Virginia Woolf's Rooms and the Spaces of Modernity

Zink, Gabriela Suzana

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Gabriela Suzana Zink

King's College London

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Abstract

The present study aims to expand recent scholarship on modernism's engagement with space by uncovering the centrality of "the room" in Woolf's writings. Although the iconic "room of one's own" has long been considered the cornerstone of Woolf's feminist politics, criticism has been slow to recognise the significance of the multitude of rooms in her œuvre, from rooms evocative of domestic, national and colonial space in the works of fiction to rooms as loci of memory in "A Sketch of the Past." This thesis argues that Woolf's writings not only foreground such spatial representations but also model ways of reading and understanding space which anticipate current theoretical observations. The spatial formation of rooms sits at the heart of Woolf's interweaving of the political and the aesthetic, yielding an understanding of space itself as dynamic, layered and relational.

Previously unexplored "common readers'" responses to *A Room of One's Own* preface the discussion. This allows new reader stories to emerge and offers a fresh perspective on the impact of the 1929 polemical essay on its historical readers. The focus then shifts to Woolf's debut novel, where the room trope configures a symbolic space of ideological constraints bound up with patriarchal ideas of women, empire and the nation. *Night and Day* overlaps the material and the textual to critique memorialization practices and negotiate Victorian legacies, a negotiation also thematised in *The Years*, where rooms chart a family's progress through modernity. The chapter on *Jacob's Room* tells the story of an absence, reading the novel's university rooms in conjunction with women's struggle for education at Cambridge. Finally, rooms are shown to map out a geo-history of the self in "A Sketch of the Past," weaving personal history and wartime trauma.

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Abbreviations of Texts by Virginia Woolf

AROO	*A Room of One's Own*
BA	*Between the Acts*
CE	*Collected Essays* (4 vols.)
D	*The Diary of Virginia Woolf* (5 vols.)
E	*The Essays of Virginia Woolf* (6 vols.)
F	*Flush*
JR	*Jacob's Room*
L	*The Letters of Virginia Woolf* (6 vols.)
LS	*The London Scene*
MB	*Moments of Being*
MD	*Mrs Dalloway*
ND	*Night and Day*
O	*Orlando*
P	*The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of The Years*
PA	*A Passionate Apprentice*
TG	*Three Guineas*
TL	*To the Lighthouse*
VO	*The Voyage Out*
TW	*The Waves*
TY	*The Years*

Introduction

In a letter from Bronxville, New York, dated 6 February 1935, Isabel Forbes Milton – one of Woolf's many contemporary readers who took the time to express their admiration in writing – offers what may be seen as an early critical response to rooms in Woolf's work. Milton not only notes the recurrence of the room trope in Woolf's writing, but also uses it as a readerly strategy to engage with the author and her fiction. The letter, an extraordinary example of "proto-criticism," deserves quoting at length:

> My dear Virginia Woolf,
>
> For years in Minnesota, in Illinois, I have been writing you letters in my mind. It seems a little strange that all that time when I was pursuing the leisurely peripatetic pace behind cloistered walls I should never have confided any of these messages to paper – & that now when I am still dizzied from the futile attempt to fit into the New York time-pattern […] I should at last get down to it. I suppose that is partly explained by the fact that I now have a room of my own (and $1200 a year!), where last night and this morning I have been propped up in bed reading you again – No leisure for my own pursuits comes legitimately with my room & stipend, since these are rewards for handling 150 different students every day in a highly organized, nervous public school. But I am indulging in the luxury of a sore throat today […].
>
> Just outside my window a little black spaniel is sniffing the bright snow crust. I remember how you brought Flush aware & snuffing out of Elizabeth Barrett's letters. […]
>
> You have very few outdoor scenes in your writings, do you know? […]

> Yes, it seems to me your people are always in rooms. Walls are clearly defined: – Orlando in his small chamber at his writing desk, or kneeling in the great hall to kiss Elizabeth's hand. Bernard waiting for doors to open or shut in the café – or if your people are moving between rooms, there are the walls of long corridors or of city streets defined by buildings – or the sliding evanescent walls of consciousness.
>
> I think of you, too, within walls – receding deeper & deeper into the background of whatever room you inhabit, & of that room of your own, & defining each mutation of the atmosphere as you move. […]
>
> I often try to picture the house you live in. I can see you so vividly as you live at certain moments. Never in the morning, somehow, but in the afternoon or evening. Over & over I have imagined having tea with you. […] There are so many things I want to ask you. But I recall Pound's doleful "I had over-prepared the event," & content myself with awaiting your next book, knowing that I shall meet you fully there while you could never meet me freely anywhere. (Daugherty, "Letters from Readers" 138-9, emphasis in the original)[1]

Milton starts by locating herself, indicating the space and time of writing – her room on a sunny winter day – which takes her back to the imperative of *A Room of One's Own*. Like some of Woolf's other readers, she confesses that work takes most of her time, leaving little room for leisurely pursuits such as reading.[2] Writing to Woolf is a moment of stolen pleasure and the materialisation of other, unwritten messages – "letters in the mind" – formulated in other places. From the description of her surroundings, she turns to Woolf's fictional world: the trigger is the "little black spaniel" outside her window, whose sight recalls the canine protagonist of the 1933 mock biography and prompts her comment on what she

[1] All the quotations from the letter refer to Daugherty, "Letters from Readers" (*Woolf Studies Annual* 12, 2006).
[2] A detailed discussion of these other letters to Woolf features in chapter 2 of this study.

perceives as the scarcity of "outdoor scenes" in Woolf's writing: "I wish you had to fetch lead pencils more often!" (138). The lead pencils represent a playful allusion to the narrator's pretext for roaming the streets of London and "the only spoil we have retrieved from the treasures of the city" in Woolf's 1927 essay "Street Haunting: A London Adventure" (*CE*4: 166). This, like the later, explicit reference to "On Not Knowing Greek," suggests the reader's familiarity with Woolf's larger body of work.

Milton then revisits different rooms in *Night and Day*, recalled with clarity despite "hav[ing] not so much as beheld the cover of the book for three years," an indication of the memorable character of the spatial representations evoked (138, emphasis in the original). These include the Hilbery drawing-room in Cheyne Walk where, placing herself within the scene, the reader joins the characters in a form of empathetic textual analysis. She then points to the multilayered meaning of the room as physical and psychic space, expressed through the juxtaposition of material rooms and the "evanescent walls of consciousness" (139). The image conjures up (porous) boundaries and thresholds, as well as different types of space, from the intimate space of Orlando's chamber to public cafés, while the characters' movement between rooms gives rise to an analogy between the topography of interior space – "long corridors" – and the geography of the city: "streets defined by buildings" (139).

Next, the reader uses the room image in an attempt to seize Woolf through the imaginative exercise of picturing her "within walls," but the object of her desire eludes her, "receding deeper and deeper into the background" (139). The voyeuristic exercise – unsurprising for a fan letter – is, however, soon abandoned in favour of a more authentic and freer place of encounter, Woolf's next book, which Milton awaits with impatience. The material room where reader and writer might meet over tea – "[f]or I would rather meet you than any one alive in the world today" – is replaced by a textual place of encounter (139).

Milton, however, is no uncritical fan. Only twenty-three at the time, she is a demanding young reader, hoping from Woolf "that novel for which all of your others are studies" (140). She is a knowledgeable reader, too – displaying familiarity not only with Woolf's novels and essays, but also with writers such as Ezra Pound, Katherine Mansfield, Gertrude Stein and T. S. Eliot, whose mention at different points in the letter gestures towards the wider space of modernism. In expecting "at last […] a novel which should be immediately of this time & indirectly of every time," she calls for a work displaying both political awareness and universal appeal in its understanding of human consciousness, thus suggesting that Woolf's work held potential for a more organic merging of the two (140).

Milton's letter offers valuable insight into the reception of Woolf's work from the perspective of a transatlantic contemporary reader with a "natural" interest in "the literature of experimentation" (139). At the same time, it also testifies to the reach of Woolf's writing, shown to unwittingly touch the lives of a variety of readers, as well as creating communities of readers regardless of age differences. This is conveyed by a passage in the letter where Milton relates how she became part of the "inner circle" of a woman "fifty years my senior" on admitting to having read Woolf (139). In the young reader's words: "you have created other friends for me. I daresay you do not realize how many people you have drawn together" (139).

The idea of the writer's voice reaching out to, and connecting, people is an observation echoed by other contemporary readers whose letters have recently been uncovered by Anna Snaith, Melba Cuddy-Keane and Beth Rigel Daugherty. This study adds to the growing body of work on contemporary readers' responses to modernist writing by telling the story of yet another not-so-common reader, Mary Geraldine Ostle, whose involvement in women's cause resonated with Woolf's feminist ideas. The virtual intersections between Ostle's and Woolf's

work will be detailed in chapter 2, but Milton's comment about Woolf "drawing readers together" provides a suggestive point of entry into that particular story.

If the American fan displays remarkable insight into Woolf's writing of rooms, she is less attentive to "the ways in which she documents, celebrates, fictionalises and transforms the activity of walking through urban spaces" (Shiach, "London Rooms" 50). Milton's assumption about Woolf's walking habits – "I have the impression that you have never walked much" – or her comment on the precedence of interior space over "outdoor scenes" in her work are less perceptive (138). Unlike present-day readers, however, Milton did not have access to the wealth of (auto)biographical materials made available to the public in the latter decades of the twentieth century. These provide ample evidence of what Hermione Lee calls Woolf's "life-long hobby of 'street haunting,'" as does her fictional and non-fictional work (*Virginia Woolf* 206).

Lee's reference to the much-discussed 1927 essay is significant. "Street Haunting: A London Adventure" offers a perfect example of the conjunction between interior and exterior space in Woolf's writing, the "shell-like covering which our souls have excreted to house themselves" on the one hand and kaleidoscopic images of the city, on the other (*CE*4: 156). The home left behind is the shell-house, an image which, however "hackneyed" – in Gaston Bachelard's words – retains its "primal" and "indestructible" meaning (121). The essay ends on the narrator's return home and the admission that "it is comforting to feel the old possessions, the old prejudices, fold us round, and shelter and enclose the self which has been blown about at so many street corners" (*CE*4: 166). The image is expressive of the fragility of the self exposed to the flux of the city, anticipating Bachelard's metaphor of the house-less human as a "dispersed being" (7). The essay, then, rests on the dialectic of inner and outer, the narrator's experience of the city being bound up with the organic memory of home / built space.

Representations of urban space in Woolf's writing have received considerable critical attention. The next chapter examines more closely the strand of Woolf scholarship generated by her engagement with the space of the city, as well as its implications. However, separating the two is, to a certain extent, artificial. As this study demonstrates, an exploration of rooms in Woolf's work is not only a story of turning inward towards material and psychic interiority – empowering as that was for women – but also one of turning outward, towards the wider spaces of modernity, including national and imperial space. It is a contention of this study that Woolf's rooms are not discrete spaces, conceived in strict separation from other "geographies" of modernity, but rather as connected with, and participating in these geographies. Thus, the trajectory followed here is "in and out of rooms" – to use Woolf's apt image – in an attempt to uncover the discourses, practices and relations encoded in her spatial representations. In doing so, this thesis questions a too narrow understanding of private / public, inner / outer spatial divisions, acknowledging what Henri Lefebvre termed the "ambiguous continuity" of spaces (*The Production of Space* 87) and what Andrew Thacker has identified as a "key characteristic of the modernist engagement with space," namely "[t]he switch from rooms to geopolitics and back again" (7).

To go back to the 1935 American fan letter for another moment, Isabel Forbes Milton's interrogation about Woolf's foregrounding of the room throughout her work (including in the titles of the 1922 novel and the 1929 polemical essay) appears fully justified. What, indeed, can explain the appeal of "rooms" and their prominent position within Woolf's spatial imaginary? This study's answer is that rooms bridge the aesthetic and the political, articulating the conjunction between the modernist interest in subjectivity and an understanding of the ways in which built space both embodies and actively shapes human relations. The writings examined here exhibit a systematic use of spatial imagery; more importantly, perhaps, they are suggestive of ways of reading and understanding space,

drawing attention to the textuality of material spaces, and the intersections between the metaphorical and literal meanings of space, particularly fruitful for modernist writing.

*

The thesis starts with a discussion of the "spatial turn" in modernist studies, looking both at the theoretical underpinnings of the interest in space and place in the social sciences and the humanities in the latter decades of the twentieth century, as well as the perspectives which such an approach to modernist literature yields. My discussion here is in line with readings of modernism which view its manifest engagement with the different spaces of modernity – whether private, public, national or transnational – as anticipating postmodern observations on the nature of space. As shown later, attention to space in Woolf's work has often taken the form of an emphasis on representations of urban space and the figure of the *flâneuse* as encapsulating modern experience. This focus has somewhat obscured her writing of rooms as part of wider geographies, including urban and imperial space.

Recent work in modernist studies promoting a "return" to rooms as constitutive of the spatial experience of modernity tends to frame the opposition between the outer spaces of the city and interior space in terms of competing domestic / anti-domestic visions of the modern. An illustrative example is Christopher Reed's discussion of mainstream modernism as anti-domestic, and more recent affirmations of the existence of a "domestic modernism" generating change from within the private sphere. While recognising the importance of spatial representations of domesticity in Woolf's work, this study aims to adopt a broader view of "rooms" as extending beyond the domestic, in an attempt to showcase the varied uses of the room trope across her oeuvre, as well as her dynamic spatial sense of modernity.

Chapter 2 takes as its starting point Woolf's iconic "room of one's own," approaching it from the angle of previously unexplored contemporary readers' responses to the text. The surviving Monk's House letters allow us to gain fresh insight into the ways in which Woolf's

historical readers engaged with the arguments expressed in the 1929 essay. They also provide information about the literal circulation of the text and its sometimes unexpected reverberations in the lives of readers whose political views resonated with Woolf's.

Chapter 3 discusses the protagonist's voyage of self-discovery in Woolf's debut novel, examining the extent to which the narrative of Rachel's formation is bound up with patriarchal ideas of women, empire and the nation. Pieces from *The Early Journals* recording young Virginia's travel experiences already touch upon the implications of travel for a renegotiation of "home" and the national imaginary. *The Voyage Out* echoes these early texts as, for instance, in the image of England as a prison-like island, which is central to the novel's exploration of gender and national identity. Despite the potentially transgressive nature of the move away from the domestic rooms of the imperial capital, Rachel's voyage to South America deflates its own promise of freedom, showing women's difficulty in positioning themselves within the framework provided by patriarchal discourses.

Woolf's exploration of the intersection of space, gender and patriarchy in her debut novel continues in *Night and Day*. Here, the focus is on a late Victorian household turned into a site of literary heritage, hence the novel's critique of memorialisation practices which are shown to reinforce patriarchal gender roles. The conjunction between material and textual space – figured through the juxtaposition of the house in Cheyne Walk with the great poet's biography – promotes a reading of rooms as "texts of memorialisation." The novel thus explores the archival function of built space, here intended to perpetuate the Victorian ideal of greatness, at odds with the changing landscape of modernity.

As chapter 5 demonstrates, the representation of Cambridge in *Jacob's Room* articulates a similar critique of built space as bound up with gender ideologies. Like Edward Pargiter's Oxford room in *The Years*, Jacob's Cambridge room circumscribes not only a formative masculine space inaccessible to women, but also values which connect male

education with militarism and war, a link forcefully expressed in *Three Guineas*. The chapter uncovers an overlooked context to the writing of the novel, namely Cambridge women's struggle for degrees and full membership to the university. The discourses surrounding this debate – often framed in spatial terms – mirror Woolf's critique of Cambridge in the novel, as well as her formal conception of the text, as detailed in chapter 5.

Chapter 6 develops Andrew Thacker's suggestion that Woolf's 1937 novel records a form of spatial history. This history takes the reader from the highly gendered divisions of the late-Victorian home (illustrated by emblematic spaces such as the sickroom and the male study) to new modes of living across the city. The spatial shifts in the novel, indicative of a break with the Victorian legacy of separate spheres, include class mobility, and the increasing sense of the interconnectedness of space, suggested by network images. Nevertheless, the spatial history that *The Years* unfolds is neither constituted of linear progress nor devoid of ambivalence towards the blurring of spatial divisions, as shown in the "present day" section of the novel.

Woolf started "A Sketch of the Past," the focus of the last chapter in this study, towards the end of her life, at a time when memory, private space, as well as her readership came under threat in the face of the imminence of war. The rooms in this fragmentary, incomplete memoir are material spaces reconfigured imaginatively as loci of memory, mapping out a geo-history of the self which anticipates Gaston Bachelard's topoanalysis in *The Poetics of Space* but also problematises his view of the house as benign space.

As this study demonstrates, an examination of rooms in Woolf's work reveals her writing to be more attuned to the *situatedness* of experience than acknowledged previously. This is not to say that Woolf puts forth a systematic or consistent materialist argument, nor that her representations of built space have the photographic sharpness and accuracy of detail found in realist fiction. Woolf notoriously criticised that approach to reality in her discussion

of materialist writers in "Modern Fiction," opposing them to what she called "spiritual" writers such as James Joyce (*CE*2: 107). Nevertheless, her works often formulate subtle observations on the relation between modern subjects and the material places in which they live, as well as on the ways in which these are connected to other spaces of modernity.

Woolf's notion of "the dark places of psychology" as the "point of interest" for spiritual writers in the 1919 essay is significant in its use of spatial imagery to express modernist subjectivity as interiority, alongside the model of subjectivity as flux (*CE*2: 108).[3] In her writing, rooms provide a means of representing such psychic interiority, albeit one which is unavailable, as in the famous example of Jacob's empty room, or multiple / unstable – as in Bernard's picturing himself as "many rooms – many Bernards " (*TW* 217).

Rooms, however, are often more than mere figurations of psychic interiority, expressing an epistemological position "as embodied, engendered and embedded in the material context of place and space" (Duncan 1). This is particularly instrumental to Woolf's feminist politics and her critique of patriarchy in both her fiction and non-fiction. The archival function of built space – the ways the latter embodies and perpetuates hierarchical relations – explored in the works considered here shows how this critique is played out across Woolf's engagement with space, and how often her writings invite us to read spaces textually (as, for instance, in her 1919 novel).

Modern subjects' sometimes vexed relation with the spaces they inhabit complicates any attempt at a simple equation between material space and metaphorical space in Woolf's work. Her rooms do not fit neatly into a stable theoretical framework, nor does her theorising of space / rooms yield a single, unambiguous interpretative grid. Ultimately, it is their *referential instability* – the shift from material to textual to metaphorical space – that makes Woolf's rooms distinctively modern, and a compelling object of investigation.

[3] In the same essay, Woolf conceives of subjectivity as "this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit" exposed to "a myriad impressions" falling upon the mind as "an incessant shower of innumerable atoms" (*CE*2: 106).

Chapter 1

Re-Reading the Modern

The "Spatial Turn"

In their introduction to the critical volume *Thinking Space* (2000), geographers Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift start with the assertion that "[s]pace is the everywhere of modern thought" (1). Somewhat provocative, Crang and Thrift's formulation has two specific functions: first, to acknowledge the importance that spatial concerns have gained in a wide range of disciplines across the humanities and social sciences over the last decades, and second, to highlight the practical difficulties involved in using space as a critical tool, a point to which I will return shortly. Crang and Thrift's statement – an adequate preamble to a volume which surveys work on space by a variety of thinkers including Walter Benjamin, Georg Simmel, Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel de Certeau, Henri Lefebvre, Hélène Cixous and Michel Foucault – both echoes and confirms a prediction made over three decades earlier, namely that "[t]he present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 22). It is thus that Michel Foucault hailed the beginning of a new spatial era in his 1967 lecture on heterotopia, published in the French journal *Architecture / Mouvement / Continuité* in 1984, shortly after his death. What prompted Foucault and other thinkers at the time, most prominently Henri Lefebvre, to turn their attention to space and spatiality was a shift in the understanding of space from "a neutral container, a blank canvas […] filled in by human activity" – therefore an "absolute or 'empirico-physical' conception [which] suggested that space can be conceived as outside of human existence" – to space as socially produced and bound up in social interactions (Hubbard et al. 4). In his groundbreaking 1974 work *The Production of Space*, published in English in 1991, Henri Lefebvre maintains that "space is never empty: it always embodies a meaning," and this meaning is produced through social

practice (154). Lefebvre's view that "any space implies, contains and dissimulates social relationships" (*The Production of Space* 82-83), and that [s]pace is political and ideological" ("Reflections on the Politics of Space" 31), has proved extremely influential in subsequent thinking about space and the critical practices it has generated.

In *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century* (2002), Phillip E. Wegner discusses the ensemble of critical practices originating in this paradigmatic shift in terms of "spatial criticism," which he defines as "an emerging interdisciplinary formation centred on the problematics of 'space', 'place' and cultural geography" (180). As Wegner explains, the "vast and multiform research project" of spatial criticism draws on work in a variety of fields, among which social theory / history, geography, architecture, anthropology, philosophy, art, literary and cultural criticism (180).[1] The proliferation of space-oriented theoretical and critical writing from the 1980s onwards has been paralleled by a renewal of interest in earlier texts and thinkers, such as Martin Heidegger's discussion of dwelling, Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* or Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* (Wegner 180-1).

Highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of spatial criticism, Wegner notes that the focus on space and spatiality in literary studies stems both from clearly defined critical approaches such as Marxist, colonial, postcolonial, feminist and gender studies, as well as "from a rich and growing conversation with work being done in a broad range of other disciplines" (181). So what does spatial criticism mean for our reading and understanding of literature? Wegner suggests a number of ways in which literary studies benefit from drawing on this critical perspective. In general terms, "[a]n attention to issues of space and spatiality promises to change not only how we read literature, but also what we read" (Wegner 196). Raising the question of the "assumptions and expectations about literary value" which a shift

[1]Wegner provides an extensive list of contributors to current debates on space and spatiality including geographers, architects, anthropologists, philosophers, art, literary and cultural critics. Another, "contentious" – in the editors' words – because inevitably incomplete, list of thinkers on space features in the volume *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (2004), edited by Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin and Gill Valentine.

in critical approach may bring to light, Wegner suggests that spatial criticism entails re-reading the canon as well as re-configuring it through uncovering "marginalized forms and practices" (197). The idea of providing new readings of, and fresher insights into, texts or whole literary periods is important here. Approaching modernism – and therefore Virginia Woolf – from the perspective of "spatial criticism" has signified until relatively recently reading it against "mainstream" critical approaches, in particular a "tradition within critical discussions of modernism that privileges the experience and representation of temporality" (Thacker 2).

Very early on, Woolf's preoccupation with conveying the inner life of her characters, including their subjective apprehension of time, ranged her among "Bergsonian" writers like Marcel Proust or James Joyce. It also led to critics relating her "moments of being" to the Proustian mechanism of involuntary memory and James Joyce's epiphany. As Jean Guiguet notes, critical attention to time in Woolf's work dates back to the late 1930s and 1940s, when articles such as Lodwick Hartley's "Of Time and Mrs Woolf" (1939), James Southall Wilson's "Time and Virginia Woolf" (1942), John Graham's "Time in the Novels of Virginia Woolf" (1949) came out (382). This critical focus continued in the second half of the twentieth century. In her 1970 study, Harvena Richter shows that although, according to Leonard, Woolf did not read Bergson, her moment of being "resembles his concept of duration (*la durée*) in which time is qualitative, nonspatial, real, vertical, and always present" (39).[2] Thus, a character's experience of time in Woolf's writing is essential in conveying "the particular quality of that character's state of consciousness" (Richter 39). These time-oriented readings mostly emphasise Woolf's concern with the fluid nature of personal subjectivity, showing modernist sensibility to be often alienated from the external world.

[2]However, as Richter points out, Bergson's theory was very much part of the philosophical climate at the time and so Woolf had at least indirect access to it. She also came in touch with it via Marcel Proust's work, which she started to read in 1922.

As the editors of the recent critical volume *Literary Landscapes: From Modernism to Postcolonialism* (2008) admit, alienation from place is a recurrent motif in modernist fiction to the extent that some critics have turned it into a criterion as to whether a text can be considered as modernist (De Lange et al. xi). For an early critic such as Georg Lukács, the modernist experience of alienation confirmed the notion of modernism's "rejection of history" or, at least, its "tend[ency] to present social and historical phenomena as static" (35). De Lange et al., however, argue that "typically modernist experiences of alienation, ennui, the *unheimlich* and the sense of being an outsider do not preclude subtle and probing investigations into the complex interrelationships between particular individuals and particular spaces and places" (xii).

The terms in which these observations on Woolf and modernist literature are couched highlight some of the assumptions long associated with the time–space dichotomy. As the geographer Doreen Massey has shown, approaching time and space as an "A/Not-A" dualism – that is defining one as lack of the other – has far-reaching implications (255).[3] In the literature using this approach, time usually occupies the position of A, with space being relegated to that of not-A and therefore defined as a lack of elements such as "change, movement, history, dynamism" (Massey 256-7). A set of further dualisms underlies the time / space dichotomy: "History, Progress, Civilization, Science, Politics and Reason" typically associated with time counter "stasis, ('simple') reproduction, nostalgia, emotion, aesthetics, the body" commonly aligned with space (Massey 257).

An early discussion of spatiality in modernist literature – whose reception confirms some of the theoretical assumptions detailed above – is Joseph Frank's 1945 analysis of "spatial form" as a characteristic of modernist fiction. Analysing writers like James Joyce, Marcel Proust or Djuna Barnes, Frank conceived of spatial form as a means to convey

[3]Taking up the argument of other feminist scholars, Massey contends that the same dualistic thinking underpins "the construction of the radical distinction between genders in our society" (256).

"simultaneity of perception […] by breaking up temporal sequence" (231). Frank focused on the formal aspects of modernist fiction and their consequence for the practice of reading modernist writing. For instance, *Ulysses*, whose aim was "to give the reader a picture of Dublin seen as a whole," conveys "the […] sense of simultaneous activity occurring in different places" through a non-linear narrative, the formal illustration of the author's "esthetic intention" (233, original spelling). Thus, in Frank's essay, "space is conceived as the spread of text upon paper and page, or the narrative pattern of a text read through time," which leaves out the actual "kinds of space […] represented in modernist texts" (Thacker 4). Since its first publication in 1945, his article has incurred repeated criticism.[4] In "Spatial Form in Literature: Toward a General Theory" (1980), W. J. T. Mitchell shows that one objection to Frank's concept of spatial form was that in giving "misplaced concreteness" to what was, in fact, a "mere metaphor," spatial form "denie[d] the essentially temporal nature of literature" (541). As Mitchell notes, one way to overcome this divergence is by questioning the reading of spatial form "as an antithesis or alternative to temporal form" (542). In Mitchell's words:

> The common mistake of regarding space and time as antithetical modalities is reflected in the tendency of literary critics to speak of spatial form as "static," or "frozen," or as involving some simultaneous, instantaneous, and wholistic impression of that which is "really" temporal. (542)

Mitchell brings together the two terms of the dichotomy in philosophical terms by stating that "spatial form is the perceptual basis of our notion of time" (542). This assertion recalls elements of Gaston Bachelard's poetics, in particular his notion of the spatiality of memory, as discussed in a later chapter.

[4] Frank responded to criticism in "Spatial Form: an Answer to Critics" in *Critical Inquiry* 4.2 (1977): 231-252 and "Spatial Form: Some Further Reflections" in *Critical Inquiry* 5.2 (1978): 275-290.

Addressing the limitations of Frank's concept of spatial form but also its merits, Andrew Thacker uses Lefebvre's notion of social space to reformulate Frank's formal approach as a new spatial project aiming "to understand how social spaces dialogically help fashion the literary *forms* of the modernist text" (4). As to viewing a spatial approach as "a rejection of history," Thacker points out, with Edward Soja, that "social space […] is dialectically related to history and time" (4-5). The phrases "spatial history of modernism" and "literary geography" foregrounded in Thacker's study emphasise his concern with the interrelation between modernist writing and the historical conditions unpinning the new spatial experience of modernity at the turn of the nineteenth century (5). Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker's term "geographies of modernism," heading their 2005 volume of criticism, suggests not only the existence of different spaces and spatial formations against which modernism may be reread, but also different ways in which modernist subjects engaged with those spaces. This, the editors maintain, makes "considering modernism from the point of view of a critical cultural and literary geography […] a timely, and indeed necessary project" (Brooker and Thacker 1).

The project which Brooker and Thacker evoke here corresponds to an important axis of development for the "new modernist studies," hailed by Rebecca L. Walkowitz and Douglas Mao in 2008. Walkowitz and Mao conceptualise the different shifts and developments in modernist literary studies in terms of "expansion," a notion whose (already spatial) meaning subsumes "temporal, spatial, and vertical directions" (737). The geographical extension of the parameters of modernist culture suggested by Walkowitz and Mao's "spatial broadening" has been the object of further investigation, as illustrated by the recent *Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (738). Mark Wollaeger's introduction is framed in consistently spatial terms, from the volume's declared intention to "open a comparative space within Anglophone scholarship" for less central productions, to its

envisaged revision of the "maps of modernism" (3-4). Wollaeger's insistence on the volume's attempt at undermining "rigidly binary" relations between centre and periphery echoes Phillip Wegner's point about the potential of spatial criticism (6). Wollaeger views the move from "old modernism to new" as "largely motivated by critics' desire to revitalize a field that had fallen into disfavour," which he explains partly in terms of postmodern critical evaluations of modernism, including its formal experiments seen as "a retreat from history" (7-8). However, as Wollaeger admits, the postmodern critique of the modernist canon has also resulted in "opening it to new voices" and "a wider range of authors and texts," contributing thus to the "renewal" of modernist studies (8).

The question of postmodern evaluations of modernist writing and culture evoked by Wollaeger in the context of the new modernist studies also bears relevance to the space – time debate discussed here. The association between the "spatial turn" and postmodernity partly explains the belated focus on space in modernist literature. For cultural critics such as Fredric Jameson, the spatial turn constitutes a paradigmatic shift from "the great high modernist thematics of time and temporality" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 16). In his 1991 work *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson maintains that "we now inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic" to the effect that "our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism" (16). Jameson echoes Foucault, who, in his lecture of March 1967, claimed that the previous century's "great obsession" with history had been replaced by a concern with space, inherent in our "epoch of simultaneity: […] the epoch of juxtaposition, […] of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed" ("Of Other Spaces" 22).

The corollary of Jameson's claim is that the current interest in space and spatiality "reflects […] the position and the social world occupied by the contemporary critic" (Thacker

1). In other words, the spatial turn is symptomatic of a postmodern awareness. However, while it is indisputable that much theoretical thinking about space has emerged in the postmodern period, the question remains as to whether, "if space and geography are important theoretical orientations today, […] they only recapitulate some of the central concerns of modernism" (Thacker 2). Andrew Thacker's answer is that modernist literature displays a clear concern with space in a period which saw the emergence of a new experience of space and time due to mechanical and technological changes such as the telephone or the car. This explains modernist writers' fascination for the virtual interconnectedness of spaces and for movement across space, which can also be seen in Woolf's work.[5]

In the essay "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," Jameson acknowledges that the forms which he identifies as postmodern are not necessarily new, but already present in the modernist period, arguing "that we have something new when they become the central features of cultural production" (123). As Jameson puts it,

> [...] radical breaks between periods do not generally involve complete changes of content but rather the restructuration of a certain number of elements already given: features that in an earlier period or system were subordinate now become dominant, and features that had been dominant again become secondary.[6] (123)

In his discussion of globalisation in "Postmodernism and Space," Julian Murphet admits that "there is no tidy break between a modernist conception of world space and a postmodernist one" (126). To take just one example, the notion of simultaneity put forth as symptomatic of postmodern space was already prominent in the zeitgeist of the modernist period and "appeared in almost every field – physics, psychology, art, drama, poetry, novels, and cinema," as shown by Stephen Kern (xiii). In Woolf's work, network images – which can be

[5] For a brief discussion of the effect of the telephone on the individual's experience of space in Woolf's 1937 novel *The Years*, see the chapter "Writing Spatial History."
[6] As Robert T. Tally Jr. notes, here Jameson draws on Raymond William's "distinctions between dominant, residual and emergent cultural forms" in *Marxism and Literature* (1977), 121-127 (40).

read as spatial illustrations of the idea of simultaneity – feature prominently in the novel *The Years*, but can also be found in earlier writings such as *Night and Day*, where Mary Datchet sees herself as "the centre ganglion of a very fine network of nerves which fell over England" (64). Here as elsewhere in her work, the labyrinthine topography of the city itself constitutes a fascinating and, at times, disorientating spatial network.

The focus on urban space in modernist writing evinces the latter's sustained engagement with spatiality. If modernism is to be understood as a set of heterogeneous responses to modernity, interest in the city is hardly surprising since "[t]he city is the location where the most visible signs of modernity were to be found in the highest concentration" (Whitworth 181). In imperial capitals, the presence of "the visible signs of empire" also created a sense of globalisation, enhanced by travel as well as commercial circulation between the imperial metropolis and distant colonial territories, linking domestic to public / national through to transnational space (Whitworth 181). Thus, modernist texts map out a variety of spaces and spatial formations which have begun to receive increasing attention in recent years. The 2007 collection of essays *Locating Woolf: The Politics of Space and Place* confirms this by approaching Woolf's work from a variety of spatial perspectives – among which gendered, urban and rural, postcolonial and transcultural spaces – endorsing Andrew Thacker's "sense that modernist writing can be located only within the movements between and across multiple sorts of space" (8). The resulting spatial narratives offer a multifarious view of modernity, in line with what Melba Cuddy-Keane sees as "the characteristic turn during this period away from linear teleological definition to explorations of multiple states" ("Virginia Woolf and the Varieties of Historicist Experience" 59).

Spatial Perspectives on Woolf's Work

Anna Snaith and Michael H. Whitworth's editorial project, that of foregrounding the relevance of the categories of space and place in Woolf's work, is part of a relatively recent "critical turn" in Woolf studies. Despite earlier discussions of various aspects of her spatial politics, the volume represents – in the editors' words – "the first book-length study of Woolf and place" (Snaith and Whitworth 4). As Snaith and Whitworth note, "the recovery of Woolf's interest in space has been slow" (5). Despite the existence of "sophisticated ideas of space" at the time modernist writing was produced, it is the emergence of space as a prominent category of thought in the second half of the twentieth century that provided much of the impetus for a closer examination of Woolf's writing of space (Snaith and Whitworth 5-7).

One important critical strand in modernist and Woolf studies stimulated by the new prominence of space and place has focused on the city as epitome of modern experience, made of exhilaration and confusion, excitement and alienation. Urban space has come to occupy a privileged position in discussions of modernist literature, to the extent that retrospectively, it has served as a criterion in the making of the canon, determining for some critics the extent to which an author could be labelled as "modernist" (Whitworth 181). According to Michael H. Whitworth, Woolf's own "admittance to the modernist canon after several decades of relative neglect was partly due to the respects in which her novels met this criterion" (181). For Morag Shiach, the persistent association between modernism and the city is explicable both in terms of the role of particular, emblematically modern cities "in the production and the dissemination of modernist literary culture" and "the frequency with which urban locations and situations provide both the metaphorical and the literal landscapes of modernist writings" ("Modernism" 252).

An early example of sustained critical attention to urban space in Woolf's work is Susan M. Squier's *Virginia Woolf and London: The Sexual Politics of the City* (1985). Looking at canonical texts such as *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Years* alongside the more obscure (at the time) essays forming *The London Scene*, Squier examines the confluence of space, gender and class which "the city as both tangible and symbolic entity" helps to articulate (11).

Parallel to Squier's study, the 1980s also saw the beginnings of the "*flâneur* debate" in discussions of modernity and modernist literature.[7] Originating in Walter Benjamin's analysis of Baudelaire's emblematic figure of modernity, the *flâneur* debate has been the terrain of much discussion, including by scholars who have looked into the possibility and implications of a female *flâneur*. Woolf's representations of female characters experiencing the freedoms of urban space, from Katharine Hilbery to Clarissa Dalloway to the anonymous figure of "Street Haunting," have provided ample material for such discussions.[8] Less has been said about the city's rooms, since the emphasis on the figure of the *flâneur / flâneuse* has resulted in a critical paradigm in which the city is construed "primarily as the place and the condition of the *flâneur*" (Shiach, "Modernism" 252). This valorization of the public spaces of the city with its implication of a qualitative opposition to rooms as non-modern vestiges of a bygone era or an outmoded aesthetic has led, in Morag Shiach's view, to "the marginalization of […] the domestic interior" as instrumental to understanding "the experience of living and writing in the modern city" ("Modernism" 252).

In recent years, however, there has been a renewal of interest in the interior spaces of the city as constitutive of the experience of modernity evoked by modernist writing. Shiach's 2005 article "Modernism, the City and the 'Domestic Interior,'" which examines the significance of rooms in a number of texts by Woolf and in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, as well as the role of particular London interiors for Ezra Pound's modernist

[7] For recent summaries of this debate, see Andrew Thacker (2005) and Wendy Gan (2009).
[8] See, for instance, Deborah L. Parsons's *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (2000).

establishment, is a case in point. Shiach situates her work in the context of a shift in critical focus onto domestic interiors "as a crucial imaginative and social resource for modernist cultural production" ("Modernism" 255). This interest is reiterated in the more recent book chapter "London Rooms" (2010), which aims "to establish whether we can read a political, an aesthetic or a historical project into Woolf's representation of London rooms" (51). Here, Shiach categorises rooms "as spaces of memory, […] frameworks for identity, […] sites of integrity and security and also perhaps of a more threatening type of enclosure" (51).

Other, lengthier studies symptomatic of the valorization of modernist interiors in critical re-evaluations of modernist culture include Christopher Reed's *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, Domesticity* (2004), Victoria Rosner's *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (2005) and Wendy Gan's recent study *Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing* (2009). In his 2004 study, Christopher Reed uncovers and critiques a tendency towards depreciating the domestic in critical evaluations of modernist art, which parallels former views of so-called mainstream literary modernism. In Reed's words, after World War II "high-tech design and abstract art became the look of modernity" despite the heterogeneity of modernist movements in the first decades of the twentieth-century (2). One reason for this is that artistic renewal, as illustrated by the avant-garde movement, expressed itself in opposition to the home through a heroic rhetoric which was explicitly anti-domestic (Reed 2-3).[9]

Criticism of Bloomsbury at the time targeted its interest in domesticity, an interest which did not fit in with this heroic ideal of art and which, for Bloomsbury's detractors, stood for a manifestation of bourgeois individualism (Reed 7-11). Against this understanding of Bloomsbury, Reed argues that the group's domesticity should not be seen as divorced from

[9] The name of the movement itself "drawn from military theory […] asserts ideals of art as onslaught and of the artist as hero" (Reed 2).

interest in the public sphere but rather as a form of political positioning illustrative of their response to public concerns. As Reed writes,

> By inverting the assumption that modern art and design should accommodate the home to new conditions generated by science and technology, Bloomsbury made the conditions of domesticity its standard for modernity, projecting the values of home life outward onto the public realm in both its aesthetic and socio-political initiatives. (5)

Moreover, as Reed maintains, "the roots of Bloomsbury's group identity [lay] in a shared sense of exclusion from traditional domesticity;" their domesticity, then, was not merely unconventional but subversive, renewing the private sphere from within (5). Stories of the ways in which the Bloomsbury group's domestic set-up upset conventional notions of domesticity or decorum, including the famous anecdote of the word "semen" being uttered for the first time in the space of an English drawing-room, are now common knowledge.

Reed's contention has been taken up more recently by Victoria Rosner, who questions the idea of modernism and the domestic being "antithetical categories" (4) and who argues that "the spaces of private life are a generative site for literary modernism" (2). Rosner suggests that built space is instrumental to the modern subject's conceptualisation of inner and outer reality. Thus, the modernist "notion of psychic interiority" is informed by "the lexicons of architecture and interior design," a point which will be expanded later on in this chapter (Rosner 2). Moreover, as Rosner writes, "[u]ncovering such discursive connections […] exposes the fundamental role of the built environment in creating the categories we use to organize and understand who we are" (2).

Rosner's focus on domestic space leaves room for a consideration of the juncture between modernism's interiors and the socio-geographic landscape within which they are located. In this respect, Wendy Gan's and Youngjoo Son's comparative studies provide a

more inclusive discussion of modernism and space, by undermining rigid private / public, inner / outer binaries. Gan does so by extending the notion of "privacy" to a number of public and private spaces – the room, the garden, the city streets or the enclosed space of the car – seen as granting (albeit fleeting) autonomy to women. Son's reading of Woolf and D. H. Lawrence also complicates the private–public dichotomy by addressing both home and nation, as well as the notion of utopian space. Drawing heavily on the Lefebvrian concept of *social space*, Son argues that the two writers "disrupt the dominant socio-spatial order by refiguring private and public spaces" and that "[t]hey echo and adopt dominant spatial discourses, but […] also interrogate and reverse them" (24). Son's concern with the ideological aspects of space largely overlooks psychic interiority and issues such as the connection between self, space and memory – discussed later on in this study, which reveal the multiple intersections between the material and metaphoric dimensions of Woolf's rooms.

As the studies above illustrate, the recent critical focus on the interior spaces of the city contributes to generating a more comprehensive picture of modernist geographies. My discussion aims to contribute to this growing body of criticism, but differs from readings whose focus is exclusively domestic by adopting a broader view of "rooms," and attempting to foreground their connection with the wider material and discursive spaces within which they are located. The spaces surveyed in the present study – from the heavily gendered spaces of the Victorian house, the boat taking Rachel Vinrace away from the familiar space of home, the Oxbridge rooms in works such as *Jacob's Room* or *The Years* to the immaterial rooms of memory revisited in "A Sketch of the Past" – evince not only Woolf's systematic engagement with spatiality but also multiple ways of reading and understanding space.

Writing / Reading "Rooms"

In the words of Gaston Bachelard, "[i]t […] makes sense from our standpoint of a philosophy of literature […] to say that we 'write a room,' 'read a room,' or 'read a house'" (14). Establishing the significance of built space, more particularly the house, and dwelling for human existence and imagination, Bachelard invokes the possibility of apprehending space textually, whether it be through the practice of reading or writing, as a natural premise of his topoanalysis. Yet, how does one read a room? How does one negotiate the different semantic threads interwoven into its meaning(s)? To what extent can "the room" be theorised, and is it even desirable that rooms be theorised in the same way as one might conceptualise more readily "theorisable" topics?

These questions raise the issue of the difficulty of using space as a methodological tool, alluded to in the beginning of this chapter. While acknowledging the prominence of space in modern critical thought, Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift pinpoint that difficulty, which they explain in terms of the diversity of current writing on space across various disciplines, as illustrated by their list of different "species of spaces" (3-24).[10] Andrew Thacker, too, sees the concept's semantic vagueness as potentially counterproductive (5). As Thacker writes, within literary studies, "[t]hinking spatially about modernism involves recognition of the diverse ways in which 'space' might be applied to modernist texts" as well as "attenti[on] to the precise nuances within spatial vocabularies" (5).

Since one of the arguments put forth by this study is that Woolf's work anticipates some of the current observations on the nature of space and place, the discussion of rooms included in this section proceeds from (Woolf's writing) practice to theory, rather than the other way around. A number of Woolf's own reflections on space and rooms are used here as what one might call "theorisation models," shown to resonate with more recent spatial

[10] The introduction organises a variety of theoretical thinking on space under the headings: spaces of language, spaces of self and other, metonymic spaces, agitated spaces, spaces of experience and spaces of writing (Crang and Thrift 3-25).

theories. As spatial approaches to Woolf in recent years demonstrate, her work provides abundant food for spatial thought, but it would be misguided to suggest that her various assertions on the subject form a neatly functional theory of space / rooms. As Melba Cuddy-Keane notes, "Woolf suggests a way of raising theoretical questions without writing theoretically, of enacting both an engagement with and an escape from theory" ("Virginia Woolf and the Varieties" 68). Woolf's writings do not simply make use of spatial representations; they also model different ways of reading and understanding spaces, and in doing so, they conjure multiple interpretative models, whose productive potential lies precisely in their undermining of an "either / or" frame of meaning.

Suggestive space

The 1919 novel *Night and Day* yields one noteworthy comment on rooms by way of explaining the effect of the home in Cheyne Walk on the protagonist Katharine: "Rooms […] accumulate their *suggestions*, and any room in which one has been used to carry on any particular occupation gives off memories of *moods, of ideas, of postures* that have been seen in it" (*ND* 92, emphasis added). On entering Mrs Hilbery's room, the heroine finds herself overpowered by a sense not only of her mother's being but also of "all these influences, which had had their birth years ago, when she was a child" (*ND* 92). As chapter 4 demonstrates, the novel dramatises as well as critiques the practice of memorialisation of great men's lives embodied by the Hilberys' home. On a more immediate level, however, the passage gives expression to the interconnection between built space and human experience, in John R. Stilgoe's words: "the impact of human habitation on geometrical form, and the impact of the form upon human inhabitants" (vii). In Woolf's formulation, the room is expressive of lived space, space imbued with, and responsive to, the manifestations of

emotional, intellectual and physical life ("moods," "ideas," "postures") enacted within its walls.

The definition may be seen as productive of a first theorisation model, tracing "the room" back to the theoretical notion of place and its connotations of "location, of being or of dwelling," as opposed to "a sense of movement, of history, of becoming" usually associated with space (Thacker 13).[11] The idea of "belonging and rooted identity" attached to place underlies Martin Heidegger's discussion of dwelling as well as Gaston Bachelard's 1958 phenomenological study *The Poetics of Space* (Snaith and Whitworth 4-5). The latter's "topoanalysis" – a coinage which emphasises the link between the analysis of "the topography of our intimate being" and theoretical assumptions belonging to the field of psychology and psychoanalysis – is predicated on a number of observations which resonate with Woolf's writing of rooms (xxxvi). As Bachelard notes, "[s]pace that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor" (xxxvi). In other words, "[i]nhabited space transcends geometrical space" (47). "Positivity" gives in to "the partiality of the imagination" (xxxvi).

Woolf's room, as described in the extract from *Night and Day* above, shares with Bachelard's lived space its affective content, the imprint of human "habitation," which in turns impacts on the subject's engagement with their surroundings. Woolf's work contains numerous examples, spanning the fiction, autobiographical writings and the essays. As shown in the next section as well as the chapter devoted to "A Sketch of the Past," the relation

[11] Edward S. Casey's impressive study "The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History" charts the development of different conceptions of place and space and explains what he sees as "the marginalization of place as a significant concept" (134). According to Casey, the latter is not typical of the first centuries of modernity but goes back as early as late Hellenism and Neoplatonism through to the medieval and Renaissance periods (134). For Casey, this can be explained by the increasing awareness of place being restricted to "the specificities of a given locale" and therefore not comprehensive enough to "account for such things as distance and extension, indeed anything sheerly quantitative that refuses to be pinned down to place" (134). In the early modern epoch, place gives in to the rising significance of space to the effect that at the end of the eighteenth century, with Kant, space takes on a decidedly transcendental meaning: "space is no longer situated in the physical world but in the subjectivity of the human mind that formally shapes this world" (Casey 136).

between built space and affect is particularly apt to convey the significance of the emotional sites of childhood. The childhood home at 22 Hyde Park Gate is described as a place "tangled and matted with emotion" (MB 183); her former room – as a space split into conflicting halves, whose "fighting" emulated young Virginia's contradictory emotions (123). The scene makes the room the container of psychic life, "housing" the emotional turmoil of its young occupant more like a living body than a structure of bricks and mortar.

Turning Inward

The notion of interiority is instrumental to a reading of rooms in that it conflates the material interiority of built space and the inner life of the human subject. As Diana Fuss documents, "[i]nteriority – along with several other by-products of industrialization like intimacy, privacy, and domesticity – appears on the world stage immediately following the American and French revolutions," culminating in the nineteenth century's fetishisation of home and dwelling (8). Walter Benjamin expresses this in suggestive terms:

> The nineteenth century, like no other century, was addicted to dwelling. It conceived the residence as a receptacle for the person, and it encased him with all his appurtenances so deeply in the dwelling's interior that one might be reminded of the inside of a compass case, where the instrument with all its accessories lies embedded in deep, usually violet folds of velvet. (220)

Benjamin's visualisation of dwelling as encasement is expressive of a sense of the Victorian home as cut off from its surroundings, placing solid boundaries between itself and the world around it. The image is, of course, ambivalent; there is a clear element of claustrophobia to Benjamin's description. In Diana Fuss's words, "the sense of structural encasement, of material containment […] can be as disorienting as it is reassuring, as debilitating as it is intoxicating" (9).

Judith Flanders speaks of this in terms of an architectural inward turn, noting that in England, "[t]he small wrought-iron balconies that had decorated so many Georgian houses vanished, seemingly overnight. Thick curtains replaced the airy eighteenth-century windows, as much to block out passers-by who might look in as to prevent the damage wrought by sun and pollution" (xxiv). As shown in the next section and later on in this study, this view of the Victorian home is productive for Woolf's writing of rooms, both in her reminiscences of her life at 22 Hyde Park Gate as well as in its fictional recreations in her novels.

It is also instrumental to her critique of the ways in which spaces embody and sustain gender ideologies, anticipating feminist geographers' observation "that the design and use of our built environment is determined in part by assumptions about gender roles and relations" (Domosh and Seager xxi). As Flanders explains, "the Victorians brought the idea of home to the fore in a way that was new," making it the "emotional counterweight" to the world of work and commerce, and placing upon it moral imperatives which emphasised women's domestic role (xx). The form of segregation evoked here was replicated and multiplied in the home:

> The house was the physical demarcation between home and work, and in turn each room was the physical demarcation of many further segregations: of hierarchy (rooms used for visitors being of higher status than family-only rooms); of function (display rating more highly than utility); and of further divisions of public and private […]. (Flanders xxv)

As shown in chapter 6, Woolf's 1937 novel *The Years* displays a sustained attention to the various forms of segregation at work within the Victorian home, de-naturalising the association between women and domesticity through a critique which foregrounds "the issue of the gendering of spaces in modernism" (Thacker 6). Reading space historically, Woolf charts the dissolution of the Victorian household as a key moment in the transition from Abel

and Rose Pargiter's late Victorian period to the changing world of the younger generations in the first decades of the twentieth century.

As shown above, Woolf's spatial critique of domesticity problematises the notion of interiority, uncovering female characters' vexed relation with the space of home. At the same time, her works explore the interface between the rooms of domesticity and alternative "interiors," whether literally, as in the juxtaposition of the Hilbery home with Mary Datchet's flat in *Night and Day*, or figuratively. These alternative spaces gesture towards a different, potentially empowering "inward turn," a consequence of the emergence of new ideas about subjectivity and the human mind at the end of the nineteenth century. Discussing the shifts in short story writing at this time, Angelique Richardson writes:

> While it would be simplistic to read subjectivity along reductively gendered lines, or to neglect the effects of other social and bodily divisions such as class and race on perceptions of self and other, it is nonetheless clear that women at this time were exploring new spaces, new interiors which had previously been denied them […]. (lxv-lxvi)

Richardson's conceptualisation of the newly available realms of female subjectivity as "new spaces, new interiors" is suggestive of the "topographical model of the mind" formulated by psychoanalytic writing (Thacker 5).

In "The Unconscious," Sigmund Freud formulates the difference between psychoanalysis and "the descriptive 'psychology of consciousness'" in terms of the former's "*dynamic* view of mental processes" and its concern with "psychical *topography*," in other words with where mental acts are located (175). In his lecture on "Resistance and Repression," he uses a spatial image to speculate on the functioning of the conscious and the unconscious as adjoining rooms whose access is regulated by a "watchman":

> Let us therefore compare the system of the unconscious to a large entrance hall, in which the mental impulses jostle one another like separate individuals. Adjoining this entrance hall there is a second, narrower room – a kind of drawing-room – in which consciousness, too, resides. But on the threshold between these two rooms a watchman performs his function: he examines the different mental impulses, acts as a censor, and will not admit them into the drawing-room if they displease him. (295)

While acknowledging that these representations may seem "crude and fantastic and quite impermissible in a scientific account," he insists on their usefulness as "preliminary working hypotheses […] of service in making our observations intelligible" (295-296). Carl Gustav Jung, too, makes use of a spatial analogy to account for the "topography" of the mind. His is a layered, tripartite model consisting of "three mental levels: (1) consciousness; (2) the personal unconscious; (3) the collective unconscious" (110). Jung figures these different mental layers through the image of

> […] a building the upper storey of which was erected in the nineteenth century; the ground-floor dates from the sixteenth century, and a careful examination of the masonry discloses the fact that it was reconstructed from a dwelling-tower of the eleventh century. In the cellar we discover Roman foundation walls, and under the cellar a filled-in cave, in the floor of which stone tools are found, and remnants of glacial fauna in the layers below. That would be a sort of picture of our mental structure. (118-119)

Since for Jung, the collective unconscious goes back to archetype and myth, his model suggestively combines spatial structure with temporal depth (the different strata / storeys corresponding to different periods in human history).[12]

[12] Like Freud, Jung accompanies his analogy with a disclaimer, observing that built space cannot entirely account for the mind as a living organism, "for in the mind there is nothing that is just a dead relic, since all is

Although, as detailed in chapter 7, Woolf was ambivalent about psychoanalysis and claimed to read Freud only late in her life, her indisputable familiarity with psychoanalysis made her, like her fellow modernists, liable to the influence of psychoanalytic thought.[13] As Stephen Frosh writes, "modernist perceptions of subjectivity, individuality, memory and sociality are all deeply entwined with a psychoanalytic sensitivity" (116).[14] While it is debatable whether the parallel between material and psychic space in Woolf's writing should necessarily be traced back to psychoanalytic thought, it is clearly a recurrent image in her work, although she sometimes complicates and subverts the analogy.

An early example of the equation between built space and the human mind features in her debut novel, where the solution to Rachel's confused frame of mind inside the hotel is "movement […] in and out of rooms, in and out of people's minds" (*VO* 301). In later texts, Woolf's exploration of "interiors" yields distinctively modernist experiments with rooms, allowing her to convey the epistemological difficulty of knowing another human being. This can be expressed through the image of the absent subject as in Jacob's empty room, discussed in more detail in chapter 5, or the idea of multiple selves:

> There are many rooms – many Bernards. There was the charming, but weak; the strong, but supercilious; the brilliant, but remorseless; the very good fellow, but, I make no doubt, the awful bore; the sympathetic, but cold; the shabby, but – go into the next room – the foppish, worldly, and too well dressed. What I was to myself was different; was none of these. (*TW* 217)

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living, and our upper story, the conscious, is under the constant influence of the living and active foundations" (119).

[13] For the links between Bloomsbury and psychoanalysis, see Stephen Frosh's "Psychoanalysis in Britain: 'The Rituals of Destruction'" in *A Concise Companion to Modernism* (Blackwell, 2003), 116-137.

[14] Frosh sees the relationship between modernism and psychoanalysis as a case of cross-fertilization, arguing that "psychoanalysis, at least in its pre-World War II form, is an emblematic modernist discipline" (116).

In the passage above, the multiplication of attributes is suggestive of the performativity of the self, which precludes the possibility of a stable identity: Bernard remains unknowable both to himself and to the people around him.

These experiments, however, are not entirely divorced from political significance. To return to *Jacob's Room*, the protagonist's empty room may be read both as an indication of elusive psychic content and as a form of resistance to the patriarchal system embodied by Cambridge. A space which materialises the values targeted by Woolf's critique of patriarchy, the room becomes an *archival site* in a similar fashion to the Hilbery home in *Night and Day*, turned into a site of memorialization of a "great man"'s life. The similarity does not stop there. Both novels invite us to read space textually: *Night and Day*, by placing the poet's shrine and his biography side by side, *Jacob's Room*, by drawing attention to itself as textual space, in other words, the enactment of the author's editing and typographical choices. Chapter 5 examines one such editing decision, reading it in conjunction with a previously unexplored context to the writing of the novel, namely the debate around women and education at Cambridge.

The archival function of rooms, however, can have positive connotations, as in the narrator's pronouncement on women and built space in *A Room of One's Own*:

> […] women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must needs harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics. (114)

Here, the site of women's secluded lives, a current motif in Woolf's writing on female creativity and the hindrances met by women writers at various points in time, is viewed as potentially fecund, and outward looking. The passage rewrites the oppressive private house into a space where the accumulation of unused energy can become generative of the creative

and intellectual freedom expressed in the notion of "a room of one's own," which is both inward and outward-reaching, as the reference to "business and politics" suggests.

Turning outward

Returning to Abercorn Terrace in *The Years*, Eleanor Pargiter visualises the underground space of the city as a network of "pipes, wires, drains" (74). The image complicates the trope of the Victorian house as cut off from the city around it, connecting the private space of home with the wider urban geography, and suggesting the existence of material and immaterial (cultural and ideological) links between the different spaces of modernity, whether private or public. The image has an equivalent in the figuration of an aerial network in the 1927 essay "The Narrow Bridge of Art":

> The long avenue of brick is cut up into boxes, each of which is inhabited by a different human being who has put locks on his doors and bolts on his windows to ensure some privacy, yet is linked to his fellows by wires which pass overhead. (*CE*2: 222)

The two passages are indicative of Woolf's understanding of space as relational and a sense of modernity as hindering fixity: "it is an age clearly when we are not fast anchored where we are; things are moving round us; we are moving ourselves" (*CE*2: 218).

These observations evoke a theorisation model which anticipates the notion of social space put forth by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*, and its reappropriations by other spatial thinkers, including feminist geographers such as Doreen Massey. The resemblance between Woolf's formulation and Lefebvre's observation on the interpenetrability of social spaces is remarkable:

> Visible boundaries, such as walls or enclosures in general, give rise for their part to an appearance of separation between spaces where in fact what exists is an

> ambiguous continuity. The space of a room, bedroom, house or garden may be cut off in a sense from social space by barriers and walls, by all the signs of private property, yet still remain fundamentally part of that space. (*The Production of Space* 87)

Lefebvre instrumentally foregrounds the dynamic interplay of social relations which contemporary scholars since see as constitutive of the nature of the spatial. Summing up this paradigmatic shift in critical thinking about space, Crang and Thrift maintain that it all "in one sense or the other move[s] away from the Kantian perspective on space – as an absolute category – towards space *as process* and *in process* (that is space and time combined in becoming)" (3). In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre articulates this new understanding of space by means of "the triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived," which brings together the materiality, the conceptualisation and the experience of space: *spatial practice*, *representations of space* and *representational spaces* (39). Lefebvre defines the *spatial practice* of a society as what "secretes that society's space," in other words, the material production – through people's use – of space (38). He views *representations of space* as "conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists," which is suggestive of maps and other forms of encoding of space (38). This dimension underscores the political / ideological potential of such conceptualisations, as, for instance, in maps charting imperial expansion. Woolf alludes to these practices in her debut novel, by telling Santa Marina's story of colonialisation in terms of the change of colour on cartographic representations of the island. As for *representational spaces*, these refer to "space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols" (39).

This triad is less suitable as a "reading grid" – that is, for thinking about modernism's writing of space in terms of these distinctions – since, as Andrew Thacker points out, "Lefebvre does not offer many elaborated examples of how the […] triad interacts" (20). The

latter, however, remains productive in its suggestiveness of a dynamic and layered model of space as "the outcome of a process with many aspects and many contributing currents" (*The Production of Space* 110). As shown in this study, the slippage between material and metaphorical meanings of space in Woolf's modernist writing of rooms may be said to anticipate Lefebvre's multi-layered model of space. Her attention to the sets of relations embedded in various locations is also evocative of Lefebvre's social space. Nevertheless, her exploration of the ways in which space articulates and perpetuates gender relations, in particular, makes her engagement with space resonant with feminists geographers' "new understanding of social space" as bound up with "the gendering of space" (Tally 132).

Like Lefebvre, the geographer Doreen Massey sees space as "constructed out of social relations" and therefore inherently dynamic (2). In her words, "we need to conceptualize space as […] the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions at all spatial scales, from the most local level to the most global" (264). Instead of seeing place "as singular, fixed and unproblematic in its identity," Massey defines it in connection with space as "a particular articulation of those relations":

> The identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple. And the particularity of any place is […] constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identity through counter-position to the other which lies beyond, but precisely (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections *to* that "beyond." (5)

As Massey's analysis suggests, the Lefebvrian notion of social space renders the distinction between space and place inoperative in that it subordinates place to space as the manifestation of a similar interplay of social relations. Massey adds to this understanding of space and place the dimension of gender, arguing that "space and place, spaces and places […] are gendered

through and through. And this gendering of space and place both reflects *and has effects back on* the ways in which gender is constructed and understood" (186).

Massey's insistence on the gendering of both space and place is helpful for understanding Woolf's relational view of space, manifest in her writing of rooms as connected to wider spatial formations, as well as her spatial critique of patriarchy. In her debut novel, for instance, she juxtaposes home and away, exploring the limits of Rachel's freedom of movement between the imperial capital and the far-off South American continent. The heroine is not only a body on the move between different rooms, different spaces, but also a being in formation, whose death signals the impasse of the modern subject (significantly figured through spatial images of entrapment). A similar dynamic sense of modernity underlies the story of the Pargiters' progress in *The Years*, where the claustrophobic rooms of the Victorian home in Abercorn Terrace contrasts with the increasing permeability of boundaries in the later sections of the novel.

As argued in the following chapters, Woolf's rooms are best understood in conjunction with other material and metaphorical spaces, hence the importance of apprehending these conjointly for a better understanding of her modernist engagement with space, and of the intersections between the aesthetic and the political in her work. As the theoretical considerations above suggest, Woolf's rooms are co-constitutive of the wider cultural, geographical but also ideological landscape of modernity.

A Biographical Detour

A study of Woolf's writing of rooms cannot do away with an – albeit cursory – evocation of her own "emotional geography," despite a number of inherent dangers. As the editors of *Locating Woolf: The Politics of Space and Place* note, one such danger lies in what Woolf herself cautioned against, namely a form of readerly worship of specific locations

associated with a writer's life, which tends to "fetishize authorial presence" (8). Snaith and Whitworth cite the early essay "Literary Geography" (1905), where Woolf questions the practice of "pilgrimage," whether it be "from sentiment" or for the "scientific" purpose of determining "to what extent he [a writer] was influenced by his surroundings" (*E*1:32). Considering the notion of walking in Thackeray's footsteps "from one house to another," Woolf concedes that "we may perhaps find that it adds to our knowledge of him and of his books to see where he lived when he was writing them and what surroundings met his eye" (*E*1: 33). Nevertheless, she advises selectivity and caution in drawing too close an analogy between the material spaces inhabited by writers and the realms of their imagination: "A writer's country is a territory within his own brain; and we run the risk of disillusionment if we try to turn such phantom cities into tangible brick and mortar" (*E*1:35).

Over thirty years later, revisiting her former room at 22 Hyde Park Gate in "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf expresses a more nuanced understanding of the relation between psychic and material space. Conjuring up imaginary visitors to what had, by then, become a guest house, she presumes that "the business man from Birmingham, the lady from Cheltenham," if at all acquainted with "*To the Lighthouse*, or *A Room of One's Own*, or *The Common Reader*," would find that "[t]his room explains a great deal," a suggestion which echoes her arguments about women and lived space in *A Room of One's Own* (*MB* 123-4). As Andrew Thacker points out, in her later work, Woolf "appears to refine this early statement on literary geography, […] constructing a fiction that shows how material spaces rely upon imaginative conceptualisation, and how the territory of the mind is informed by an interaction with external spaces and places" (152-3).

Going back to some of the sites of Woolf's life as a preamble to this study feels necessary to the extent to which her thinking about space, gender and modernity was informed by her movement across different locales of turn-of-century London. What follows,

however, is by no means an exhaustive exploration of Woolf's many rooms, carried out to varying degrees of detail by Woolf scholars and biographers. These include Hermione Lee, whose monumental biography contains powerfully evocative reflections on the importance of specific houses in Woolf's life.[15] Rather, the following pages offer a brief re-reading of what may be seen as the most significant "spatial story" of Woolf's life, namely the move from Hyde Park Gate to Bloomsbury. This is an experience that she rewrites and draws on again and again in her fictional as well as non-fictional writing, using it to formulate ideas about patriarchal ideology, class, gender, education and more broadly, the condition of modernity itself. This spatial story also provides a means to think through the paradigmatic shift from her parents' late-Victorian culture to that of renewed human character and relations which she hailed in the first decade of the twentieth century. As Maggie Humm puts it, "Virginia and Vanessa's move to Bloomsbury, after Stephen's death in 1904, was not just a geographical move but a move to a new and freer psychocultural space" (*Snapshots of Bloomsbury* 13). As such, it was to have a lasting effect on the sisters' creativity and their engagement with modernity.

Although Hyde Park Gate and Bloomsbury are, without doubt, emblematic spaces in Woolf's life, any such selection is, to a certain extent, arbitrary. The spaces of one's life do not, cannot represent discrete units; one space colours one's – sometimes retrospective – "inhabitation" of another, their sum forming a spatial narrative that eschews a neat linear logic. Woolf was perfectly aware of this interconnectedness of spaces. When introducing "Old Bloomsbury" in a piece composed as a contribution to the Memoir Club in the early 1920s, she writes: "[f]rom my angle "[…], one approaches Bloomsbury through Hyde Park Gate – that little irregular cul-de-sac which lies next to Queen's Gate and opposite to Kensington Gardens" (*MB* 181). The importance of the detour cannot be overstated. As the

[15]"Houses" is the title of chapter two in Lee's biography, which retells in hauntingly beautiful prose the Stephen siblings' return to Talland House in 1905, years after their mother's death.

editor Jeanne Schulkind points out, "[i]n viewing the origins of 'Old Bloomsbury' from the angle of Hyde Park Gate, Virginia Woolf is giving an account which would […] differ from that given by one who had passed through Cambridge on the way to Bloomsbury" (*MB* 179). The detour constitutes an essential part of the story, one which is necessarily gendered. Young Virginia's experience of her parents' home in Hyde Park Gate and later, of Bloomsbury, was of necessity different from that of her brothers, a difference which she explores repeatedly in her fiction and non-fiction. In the chapter "Rooms of Memory," I approach these loci of emotional significance from the perspective of the autobiographical piece "A Sketch of the Past." There, Woolf's re-visitation of the different locales of her earlier life generates a geography in which 22 Hyde Park Gate occupies a prominent – if problematic – place.

"Mounds of plush, Watts' portraits, busts shrined in crimson velvet, enriched the gloom of a room naturally dark and thickly shaded in summer by showers of Virginia Creeper" (*MB* 164). This is how Woolf sums up the feel of the family drawing-room in the opening paragraph of "22 Hyde Park Gate," written for the Memoir Club sometime between 1920 and 1921. At the time, the fictional drawing room of the Hilberys in *Night and Day* had already come into being, unlike Abercorn Terrace in *The Years*, which was yet to be written. Both, however, share with 22 Hyde Park Gate the dark, muffled quality, as well as the sense of being cut off from the external world. Vanessa Bell's memory of her parents' house echoes her sister's: "Darkness and silence seem to me to have been the chief characteristics of the house in Hyde Park Gate" (81).

Thinking back to the "house of innumerable small oddly shaped rooms built to accommodate not one family but three" from the height of the 1920s, Woolf feels "suffocated by the recollection" (*MB* 182-3).[16] The observation follows a long, breathless enumeration of intense emotional experiences associated with 22 Hyde Park Gate, all of which turned it into a

[16] Woolf refers to the Duckworth and Stephen braches of the family as well as to "Thackeray's grand-daughter" (*MB* 182).

place “tangled and matted with emotion” (*MB* 183). The description is suggestive of an organic relation between the house and its inhabitants:

> We had permeated the whole vast fabric […] with our family history. It seemed as if the house and the family which had lived in it, thrown together as they were by so many deaths, so many emotions, so many traditions, must endure for ever. (*MB* 183)

As the chapter “Writing Spatial History” shows, in *The Years*, the same sense of enduring tradition anchored within the Victorian household – symbolised through the mother’s prolonged suffering in the sickroom – is felt as a sign of stasis and met with ambivalence. After the mother’s death, the house is sold, allowing the young Pargiters to fashion new forms of living for themselves across the city.

For the Stephen siblings it was the father’s death which brought an abrupt end to 22 Hyde Park Gate in 1904: “suddenly in one night both [house and family] vanished” *(MB* 183). In her sister’s absence from home following a second serious breakdown, Vanessa “had sold; she had burnt; she had sorted, she had torn up” (*MB* 184). Describing the move to Gordon Square, the latter wrote:

> It seemed as if in every way we were making a new beginning in the tall, clean, rather frigid rooms, heated only by coal fires in the old-fashioned open fireplaces. It was a bit cold perhaps, but it was exhilarating to have left the house in which had been so much gloom and depression, to have come to these white walls, large windows opening on to trees and lawns, to have one’s own rooms, be master of one’s own time, have all the things in fact which come as a matter of course to many of the young today but so seldom then, to young women at least. (28-9)

As Christopher Reed notes, the whiteness and spaciousness of the new Bloomsbury rooms "visually proclaimed a domestic ideology opposite to that represented by the dark woodwork and heavy red velvet of Hyde Park Gate" (22).

Bell's description of the large windows allowing a sense of continuity between the space of the city and the new domestic interior mirrors Woolf's: "it was astonishing to stand at the drawing room window and look into all those trees" (*MB* 184).[17] To this visual image Woolf adds the aural intrusion of the city, which she was to integrate into her writing of the Pargiter women's new living spaces in *The Years*: "After the muffled silence of Hyde Park Gate the roar of traffic was positively alarming" (*MB* 184-5). This was also the subject of her essay "Street Music," written in 1905, her first year in Bloomsbury. The thinner membrane separating inner and outer space introduced an element of half-exhilarating danger, partly derived from the closer vicinity of lower-class others: "Odd characters, sinister, strange, prowled and slunk past our windows" (*MB* 185). According to Angelica Garnett, Vanessa chose Bloomsbury by "[l]ooking at the *Descriptive Map of London Poverty*, made in 1899 by Charles Booth" where Bloomsbury was "marked in yellow, the same colour as Hyde Park Gate and one that designated the highest income bracket" (22). Nevertheless, the area "was not popular with London 'society' and for this reason her relatives thought the choice unfortunate and eccentric" (Spalding 48).

As the passage above suggests, Vanessa's view of the new Bloomsbury home was informed by the contrast between the two houses and the limitations and freedoms they stood for. In Woolf's words, "46 Gordon Square could never have meant what it did had not 22 Hyde Park Gate preceded it" (*MB* 182). Space was something Vanessa had sought when choosing the location – "a luxury only available, even in those days, to those in reasonably easy circumstances" (Garnett 22-3). Virginia also found it "exhilarating" (*MB* 185). Space

[17] Significantly, Vanessa Bell's painting "Apples: 46 Gordon Square" dated circa 1909-1910 incorporates a section of exterior space into her still life, inviting the viewer's gaze to slip from the apples on the tray to the aperture in the background.

meant that the sisters "each had a sitting room" alongside the "large double drawing room; and a study on the ground floor" (*MB* 185). Virginia's own room was at the top of the house, affording her views of "the tops of the huge plane trees in the square gardens" (Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 205). Even before taking possession of her new rooms, while convalescing in her Aunt Emelia's house in Cambridge, she thought of Gordon Square as the only place she wanted to be:

> I long for a large room to myself, with books and nothing else, where I can shut myself up, and see no one, and read myself into peace. This would be possible at Gordon Sq: and nowhere else. I wonder why Savage doesn't see this. (*L*1: 147) [18]

The new home meant space to pursue their artistic interests and reverse the "order" of the Victorian domestic living to which they had been constrained at 22 Hyde Park Gate: "[w]e were going to do without table napkins, […] we were going to paint; to write; to have coffee after dinner instead of tea at nine o'clock. Everything was going to be new; everything was going to be different. Everything was on trial" (*MB* 185). The new rooms were going to be the terrain of experimentation, both domestic and aesthetic. The sense of freedom and "bohemian" living expressed here offers a stark contrast to the "tea table training" and the sisters' marginal role in the spectacle of male society going through the "hoops" of the "intellectual game" in the family drawing room at 22 Hyde Park Gate (*MB* 150-153).[19] In their parents' Victorian home, the sisters' intellectual pursuits were relegated to "upstairs," away from the realm of "pure convention" downstairs (*MB* 157). In Bloomsbury, they were allowed to take centre stage.

As Christopher Reed has shown, the shift of focus from the patriarchal tradition embodied by the Stephens' home to an alternative domestic culture was visually expressed in

[18] Letter to Violet Dickinson, dated 30 October 1904.

[19] "Bohemian," however, didn't mean doing away with the privileges of their class completely. As Hermione Lee points out, the Stephen siblings still used the services of their old cook Sophie Farrell as well as those of "a maid to open the door to visitors" (*Virginia Woolf* 205).

the new home through Vanessa's choices in interior decoration. Much of the Hyde Park Gate furniture was replaced by a few functional items, including a new worktable for Virginia, "very solid and steady and nice to look at"[20] (Reed 23). Objects from Hyde Park Gate were granted a new lease of life and "shone out for the first time in the drawing room at Gordon Square" in a similar fashion to the way in which, in *The Years*, objects from the Victorian home of the Pargiters resurface in new locations across the city (*MB* 184). More particularly, Vanessa's decoration of the front hall of 46 Gordon Square – on one side, portraits of "great men" including Lowell, Darwin, Tennyson and Leslie Stephen, on the other, "five of the best Aunt Julia photographs of Mother" which "look[ed] very beautiful all together" – suggests a conscious re-working of matrilinearity within the tradition upheld by the former Victorian home (Reed 23).[21] For Christopher Reed, the display provides "[t]he most intriguing evidence of gendered self-consciousness" (23).

The Stephen siblings' iconoclastic living has been well documented in various accounts of the Bloomsbury group including Reed's, who views their domesticity as subversive and positioned "outside mainstream definitions of home and family" (7). The significance of Gordon Square for the two sisters, however, should also be seen as entwined with the wider significance of its geographical location, through Vanessa's choice, "in a district as far away in spirit from Kensington as she could find" (Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 203). The area was "prosperously bourgeois in the nineteenth century but […] by 1905 rather shabby and unfashionable" (Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 205). Home to "many women reformers of the period" as well as women living in "flats, rooms or bedsits," it offered housing which met the increasing need for accommodation for single women (Snaith, "At Gordon Sq." 257-8). Bloomsbury was also a site of political activism, with many suffrage meetings taking place "in its upstairs rooms," a geographical detail which Woolf later transposed into her fiction

[20] V. Bell to V. Woolf, 24 October 1904, Berg.
[21] V. Bell to V. Woolf, 1 November 1904, Berg.

(Snaith "At Gordon Sq." 257).[22] As Anna Snaith notes, it is in this socio-geographic context that Woolf first got a sense of herself as "a professional Lady" following her first published reviews for *The Guardian* ("At Gordon Sq." 258-9).[23]

This is recorded in the diary on 10 January 1905, where her satisfaction relates both to the immediate financial reward for the two reviews and the promise of more work to come: "Found this morning on my plate my first instalment of wages - £ 2.7.6. for Guardian articles, which gave me great pleasure. Also a book 'Women in America' for review, so that means more work, & cheques ultimately" (*PA* 219). Throughout the first months of 1905, the diary records more and more books to review (for the *National Review*, the newly established *The Outlook* as well as the *Times Literary Supplement*), hence her pronouncement on 8th February: "thus my work gets established, & I suppose I shall soon have as much as I can do – which is certainly satisfactory" (*PA* 234). Speaking of small purchases for her Gordon Square home a couple of days later, she notes: "I have earned the right to buy occasionally" (*PA* 235). The diary also records the pleasure of walking the streets of the city – humorously referred to as "my usual tramp" – on various pursuits, including fetching books from the library, teaching lectures at Morley College, going out for tea or rushing to the bookshops (*PA* 221). Although modest, the experience of freedom described by young Virginia anticipates the change of perspective resulting from the possibility of earning a living hailed in *Three Guineas*:

> The door of the private house was thrown open. […] in imagination perhaps we can see the educated man's daughter, as she issues from the shadow of the private house, and stands on the bridge which lies between the old world and the new, and asks, as she twirls the sacred coin in her hand, 'What shall I do with it?

[22] Details can be found in Anna Snaith's "'At Gordon Sq. And nowhere else': The Spatial and Social Politics of Bloomsbury."
[23] Letter 227 to Violet Dickinson, dated May 1905 (*L*1: 190).

> What do I see with it?' Through that light we may guess everything she saw looked different […]. (*TG* 172) [24]

The image of women emerging out of "the shadow of the private house" in the 1938 feminist polemic resonates with the 1929 ideal of "a room of one's own," already voiced much earlier, as, for instance, in young Virginia's longing for "a room to myself" in 1904. The two spatial metaphors offer, in condensed form, the significance of the move to Bloomsbury, and a key to understanding the importance of rooms for Woolf's spatial imaginary. More than a writer's home, Bloomsbury was to become a site of cultural production which blurred rigid boundaries between public and private, offering the possibility of alternative positionings, in line with the modernist imperative of "making things new."

[24] Three of the titles considered by Woolf for *Three Guineas* – *The Open Door*, *Opening the Door*, *A Tap at the Door* – revolve around the same spatial metaphor of liberation from the oppression of "the private house."

Chapter 2

The Woman's Room: *A Room of One's Own* and Its Contemporary Readers

In a letter dated 28 November 1938, Agnes Smith, the working-class respondent to *Three Guineas*, whose correspondence with Woolf continued until the latter's death in 1941, formulated her response to *A Room of One's Own*, and what she saw as the text's certain legacy, thus:

> I think I found more stimulation from "A Room of One's Own" than anything I have read – of late years – and I feel sure that what you have written there and elsewhere will bear fruit – even though – the harvest comes from many small shrubs here, there, and everywhere, rather than from one large and splendid tree. (Snaith, "*Three Guineas* Letters" 105)

In this letter, her second letter to Woolf following a reply which has not survived, Smith, a weaver, concedes that what she had seen as an omission on Woolf's part in *Three Guineas* was, in fact, motivated by the writer's honesty (Snaith, "*Three Guineas* Letters" 103). The point of view of an "educated man's daughter" which Woolf had adopted in *Three Guineas*, obliterating – as Smith had complained in her previous letter – working-class women's perspectives, was, she now saw, the only standpoint over which the writer could claim authority. In mentioning *A Room of One's Own* nine years after its publication, Smith not only acknowledges the link between the two texts, but also testifies to the resonance of Woolf's earlier essay for her contemporaries, as well as its appeal to a variety of readers across gender and class boundaries. Smith is not the only respondent to *Three Guineas* who refers back to *A Room of One's Own* in 1938. Letters 2 from Mary Geraldine Ostle, discussed in more detail later on, 11 from Shena D. Simon, 32 from Richard Ashbee Harman, and 48

from B. M. Bryson all mention Woolf's earlier essay. In her letter of 12 June 1938, Simon calls *Three Guineas* "a second 'Room of One's Own.'"[1]

Smith's prophecy about the dissemination of the text and its future offspring was proven right. The feminist legacy of *A Room of One's Own* comes in many shapes and forms, manifesting themselves through different media from academic studies to popular culture. The title phrase itself "has become part of our modern cultural vocabulary," and while "the room" may be replaced with various other terms such as "literature," "life" or "quest" in the diverse re-appropriations of the phrase, the symbolism of Woolf's original metaphor remains just as powerful (Rosenman 10).[2] The focus of this chapter, however, is not this later – and to a large extent, well known – legacy of *A Room of One's Own*, but rather the contemporary readership's immediate response to the text. The publication of Monk's House letters from readers in 2000, 2005 and 2006, by Anna Snaith, Melba Cuddy-Keane and Beth Rigel Daugherty, has made it possible to gain fresh insight into the reception of Woolf's writings by their historical "common readers." As Cuddy-Keane acknowledges, although this "history" is inevitably incomplete, "common readers are often, maybe always, extraordinary people, and their individuality is what makes the pool of common readers such a fascinating, complex reflection of a book's multiple and plural life" ("From Fan-Mail to Readers' Letters" 16).

The respondents to *A Room of One's Own* form a plurality of extraordinary voices, practising the kind of dialogic reading that Woolf herself encouraged. As Melba Cuddy-Keane has shown, "Woolf concentrates on the dialogic relation between reader and text, prompting the reader not simply to be receptive to the literary work but to engage in conversation with it" (*Virginia Woolf, The Intellectual* 132). It is precisely this active engagement with the arguments laid out in the essay that makes the *AROO* letters such a fascinating read. The letters echo the writer's arguments and often use the room trope to map

[1] All these letters are included in "*Three Guineas* Letters," *Woolf Studies Annual* 6 (2000).
[2] A recent example is Alexandra Ganser's *Roads of Her Own: Gendered Space and Mobility in American Women's Road Narratives, 1970-2000* (2009).

out the readers' own spatial negotiation of their (gendered) identities. They also offer insights into the respondents' reading practices and the literal circulation of Woolf's text, lending concreteness to "the space between a writer and his / her public" (Snaith, *Virginia Woolf* 120). Unlike some of the text's early reviewers who were misled by its playfulness, Woolf's common readers seem to have grasped the full force of her arguments, even when taking issue with them.

Some letters, such as Mary Geraldine Ostle's two letters to Woolf, also show that readers sometimes played an unexpected part in "widening Woolf's circle" by translating her, and their own, feminist ideals into action.[3] *A Room of One's Own* inspired Ostle to edit the reading notebooks of Evelyn Wilson, a single working-class woman, thus rescuing from complete anonymity a woman's "obscure life." Wilson's reading notes, interspersed with telling comments on her life and difficulties as a woman, resonate both with Woolf's feminist critique and with Mary Geraldine Ostle's letters. What emerges, then, is a space where the three voices intersect, a story which enriches both the history of the essay's reception and our knowledge of individual "common" readers.

The *AROO* Letters

On 23 October 1929, the eve of the publication of *A Room of One's Own* in both England and America, Woolf wrote a lucid, prescient note on what she anticipated to be the text's reception in her diary:

> It is a little ominous that Morgan wont [sic] review it. It makes me suspect that there is a shrill feminine tone in it which my intimate friends will dislike. I forecast, then, that I shall get no criticism, except of the evasive jocular kind, from Lytton, Roger & Morgan; that the press will be kind & talk of its charm, &

[3]The phrase refers to Woolf's note that "My circle has widened" in relation to her readers' response to *Three Guineas* (*D*5: 193). For more on this, see Anna Snaith's discussion of the *Three Guineas* letters in *Virginia Woolf: Private and Public Negotiations*, especially pages 124-125.

> sprightiness; also I shall be attacked for a feminist & hinted at for a sapphist; […] I shall get a good many letters from young women. I am afraid it will not be taken seriously. Mrs Woolf is so accomplished a writer that all she says makes easy reading … this very feminine logic … a book to be put in the hands of girls. I doubt that I mind very much. […] It is a trifle, I shall say; so it is, but I wrote it with ardour & conviction." (*D*3: 262)[4]

Woolf's predictions were right. As Ellen Bayuk Rosenman has documented, "the tone and design of *A Room of One's Own* baffled its first reviewers" (15). Desmond MacCarthy's assessment of the text as "feminist propaganda" which "yet […] resembles an almond-tree in blossom" is symptomatic of the early critics' difficulty in responding to "the seductive charm of the essay, the literariness with which bald, factual arguments are cloaked" (Barrett *Imagination in Theory* 36-7).[5] Woolf was also right in anticipating "a good many letters" from common readers. These started to arrive within less than a week from its publication on 24 October.

Thus, *A Room of One's Own* prompted, like Woolf's other works, immediate reactions from her readers. Among the Monk's House letters edited by Beth Rigel Daugherty in 2006, twenty-one letters (Letters 34-54) read as a direct response to the 1929 essay. At times, this is explicitly stated in the letter itself, as a justification for writing. As one respondent explains,

> I am seldom moved to the desire to write to tell an author how intensely I have enjoyed a piece of work. On the few occasions when I have been so moved I

[4] As Michèle Barrett points out, the apparent contradiction in Woolf's attitude towards the text expressed here "gives its readers space to decide for themselves how they want to take it and how they want to read it, and the openness of the text in this regard has probably been the key factor in its endurance" (*Imagination in Theory* 43-44).

[5] One respondent to the essay, Wanda Fraiken Neff, writing to Woolf on 12 January 1930 from New York, formulates the tension captured by MacCarthy's simile as "the deadly weapons of poetry, wit, and irony which compel the male reader to swallow unpalatable truth as if it were sugar" (Daugherty, "Letters from Readers" 76).

> have resisted the impulse, but the wish to write to you & tell you how sincerely I admire your work has proven too strong to be resisted. (69) [6]

As another reader puts it, "[y]ou can see that I *come hot from reading your book*, & feel so encouraged by it that I have dared to do what I have considered to be characteristic of American journalists – write to the author about it" (61, emphasis added). The author of the letter, Margaret E. Thomas, introduces herself as "the Secretary of the Odtaa Club at Girton," recalling the occasion which originated *A Room of One's Own*, namely Woolf's two Cambridge talks on women and fiction at Newnham and Girton in October 1928 (61).[7] In her letter, Thomas confesses to have "had the pleasure of hearing the paper you read to us," and praises what she sees as Woolf's accurate perception of "the sort of differences which exist in Cambridge between the men's & the women's Colleges" (61-62).[8] Thomas describes Cambridge as a place where women faced disheartening disdain towards their intellectual abilities, a critique examined in chapter 5 of this study. Woolf's essay, however, is apt to counteract, at least temporarily, the effects of such prevailing attitudes by generating a "sudden enthusiasm & freedom of spirit" in its reader (62).

Another correspondent, Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, writing from New York on 22 November 1929, confesses that "I have just finished reading A Room of One's Own, & it has excited & delighted me so greatly that I cannot refrain from writing to thank you" (65). The urgent need to respond, which some readers invoke to justify their transgression – that of assuming a form of "intimacy between reader and writer" – confirms the instant appeal of *A*

[6] Letter 40 from Lois Jarred, dated 4 December 1929. Unless stated otherwise, all the page numbers cited in relation to the letters in this section refer to Daugherty "Letters from Readers," *Woolf Studies Annual* 12 (2006).
[7] ODTAA – an acronym for "one damn thing after another," a phrase "taken from the title of a recent novel by John Masefield" – "discussed topics that were not limited to literature and the arts" and emulated male Cambridge societies such as "the Apostles" (Rosenbaum "Towards the Literary History" xvii). Beth Rigel Daugherty points out that Margaret E. Thomas "was one of the young women responsible for inviting Woolf to speak at Cambridge" ("Letters from Readers" 62). For a more detailed discussion of the circumstances in which the Cambridge lectures took place, see S. P. Rosenbaum, "Towards the Literary History," xv-xix.
[8] Thomas's view was not shared by all the young women present at Woolf's lectures. As S. P. Rosenbaum documents, Woolf's "bleak view of their academic life and prospects did not persuade some of the readers of *A Room of One's Own* who had heard the original papers that theirs was an underprivileged gender" (xvii-xviii).

Room of One's Own (Daugherty, "You see you kind of belong" 6). To a much greater extent than Woolf's fiction, this was a work whose content had immediate relevance for her readers' everyday lives, a text whose "ethical and political stakes" impacted on the "individual and collective negotiation of their own everyday relationships" (Avery and Brantlinger 259).

If it is safe to assume that the twenty-one *AROO* letters found among the Monk's House Papers constitute only a sample of the readers' actual response, it is impossible to estimate the exact number of "common readers" letters about the text, nor the number of letters that Woolf wrote in reply. As Anna Snaith and Beth Rigel Daugherty have shown, there is evidence that Woolf did not keep all her "fan mail;" likewise, most of her replies to readers have not survived.[9] Evidence for this is sometimes provided by the surviving letters, either Woolf's or her readers'. For instance, one of the *Three Guineas* letters (Letter 48 from B. M. Bryson) dated 4 September 1938, intimates the existence of a previous letter to Woolf from the same correspondent in response to *A Room of One's Own*. Writing to point out that women were working professionally before the beginning of the twentieth century, Bryson admits to have undertaken to correct Woolf again "as I ventured to do after reading your 'Room of One's Own'" ("*Three Guineas* Letters" 74). Conversely, Woolf's *Letters* contain a reply to a Mrs Wilson dated 12 September 1930, whom the editors identify as "an admirer of *A Room of One's Own*" (*L*4: 212). In her answer, Woolf addresses precise points in Wilson's letter, such as her having "a new room" and her presumably vowing not to write, which Woolf commends with mild irony: "It is most encouraging to hear that there is one woman who is not going to write – since I published my little book I have been afraid that the writers would far outnumber the readers" (*L*4: 212). Later, Woolf "vaguely" recalls Mrs Wilson and her "wild letter" containing "a bag of lavender and a bunch of heather" and "some particulars of her life" (*L*4: 270).

[9] For a discussion of the intersections between the categories of "fan" and "reader," and the specific story of one of Woolf's fans / readers, see Melba Cuddy-Keane's "From Fan-Mail to Readers' Letters: Locating John Farrelly," *Woolf Studies Annual* 11 (2005): 3-32.

The twenty-one surviving *AROO* letters range in date from 28 October 1929 to 1 April 1930 and are from England, but also the USA (Letters 37, 43, 44, 45), Italy (Letter 41), Austria (Letter 48) and France (Letter 54). As the editors of the letters have noted, this indicates Woolf's wide readership on both sides of the Atlantic.[10] The *AROO* respondents constitute a relatively homogeneous group, both in terms of gender (only two letters, 47 and 51, were written by men) and professional background. This is somewhat different from other Monk's House letters from readers, which generally evince the "heterogeneity of Woolf's reading public, the diversity of class, background and location" of those who "felt compelled to contact her, to elicit discussion" (Snaith, *Virginia Woolf* 124).[11] The reason for this may be the feminist nature of the arguments expressed in the essay, which, as detailed below, spoke powerfully to female readers.

The majority of correspondents are – established, aspiring or future – writers, which confirms Woolf's impression, formulated ironically in her reply to Mrs Wilson (cited earlier).[12] Some readers send Woolf evidence of their own work (Letters 46 and 47, for instance) or, more often, evoke it as an explanation for their engagement with *A Room of One's Own*. Miss E. J. Poignard explains her response to Woolf's text in terms of having "had a few scattered thoughts myself on the very same subject a few years ago, as this extract I have copied from an old notebook will show you" (78). James A. Mackereth accompanies his letter to Woolf by a book of his own – a "vast invitation to your patience" (79).

"[A] woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" – Woolf wrote famously in her essay, putting forth a materialist view of literary creation as embedded in the material circumstances of its production (*AROO* 4). In doing so, she posited that "these material circumstances had a profound effect on the psychological aspects of

[10] See Anna Snaith, "Wide Circles" and Beth Rigel Daugherty, "You see you kind of belong."
[11] Here, Snaith refers to the *Three Guineas* letters in particular.
[12] Cf. the editors' biographical notes about the respondents as well as the information offered in some of the letters by the readers themselves.

writing," an observation endorsed and echoed by her readers (Barrett, "Introduction" 5).[13] This argument is partly undermined by the idea of the androgynous mind later developed in the essay, which, in Michèle Barrett's words, "reveals a contradictory belief in the transcendence of art" ("Introduction" 24).[14] Nevertheless, for the most part, the *AROO* letters engage with its feminist arguments, which struck a chord with readers who could relate to the condition of women described by Woolf. The difficulties of the female artist, the material conditions needed for literary creation are recurrent themes in the respondents' letters. The readers express this identification by reformulating Woolf's arguments from the perspective of their own spatial and gendered identities.

As Regenia Gagnier has argued, the identity of the self-representing subject is, in fact, a multi-layered identity, derived from a process of construction of the self as "a subject to itself" as well as "a subject to, and of, others" (8). The subject is also a body "and therefore […] closely dependent upon its physical environment" (8). Moreover, the "I" is simultaneously "the self-present subject of the sentence" that is "subject to language" (9). This model of multi-layered self-representation seems particularly appropriate to epistolary discourse. The letter encodes the textual construction of the subject's identity, with the implicit presence of the addressee affecting the way in which that construction is carried out. In formulating their response to *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf's readers use various strategies of self-representation. The "room" is often central to these, as the readers recognize the powerful symbolism of Woolf's trope.

Thus, some readers write about the space from which their letter emerged. This is not to say that they describe the physical surroundings in which the act of writing takes place, but

[13] In the essay "Women and Fiction" published in *The Forum* in March 1929, Woolf expresses the same idea, underscoring the extent to which women's work "has […] been influenced by conditions that have nothing whatever to do with art" (*CE*2: 141).

[14] James Allan Mackereth, one of the two male readers who wrote to Woolf in response to the essay, saw in her notion of androgynous mind "a real and central truth," arguing that "[t]he truly creative artist, while at work, is unconscious of sex as of morals. He or she will work from the sum of themselves, – man-cum-woman, embodying in perfect poise the virtues, powers, and weaknesses of both" (79).

rather that they *locate* themselves, sometimes literally, in relation to Woolf and the ideas expressed in *A Room of One's Own*, using them as standards by which to measure their own lives, define their own identities. In Letter 49 dated 31 January 1930, from M. P. Thomasset, this takes the form of a barely contained cry of despair from a reader who "labour[s] under every disability of which you write" (81). Thomasset presents herself as "a Woman without £500 a year, without travel, without a room to herself" (82). Her aspirations as a writer have borne little fruit: a first novel "met with by scanty notice; a second novel, without ideal, which met with a little better luck" followed by "a series of novels, written in the common sitting room, with a mind harassed by the need of money, by constant domestic difficulties, & interruptions" (81). The terms used by Thomasset to depict the conditions in which she produced her works manifestly echo those employed in *A Room of One's Own*. Thomasset, like Woof, situates the process of writing in the materiality of everyday life, stressing the effect that the latter bears on the writer's mind. Her anxieties and suffering mirror those of Judith Shakespeare, the figure of thwarted female talent in Woolf's essay, with whom she identifies symbolically in claiming to still hold on to "that desire that killed the sister of Shakespeare" (82).

Other readers also write about their circumstances, although in more subdued tones than Thomasset. In Letter 50 dated 31 January 1930, E. G. J. Eastwood writes: "I am a woman living in 'one of those long streets somewhere south of the river' – I have a flat of my own and I earn at present £300 a year – some day it will be £400" (83). Eastwood, too, juxtaposes her location onto the imaginary geography of Woolf's text, providing these facts as proof that "we women are approaching your ideal conditions for literary development" (83).[15] Evoking the "faint, very faint, possibility" of "a scholarship to Oxford," she echoes Woolf's critique of gender inequality by claiming access to education and ultimately to wider public

[15] See *A Room of One's Own*, Chapter V: "and there came to my mind's eye one of those long streets somewhere south of the river whose infinite rows are innumerably populated" (116).

space: “I want to write eventually” (83). Dorothy Livesay, a Canadian writing from France on 1st April 1930, finds in Woolf’s essay the expression of “all my hidden rebellions” and in its title “the one phrase that matters most to a young person trying to write” (87). Like other respondents, Livesay adopts Woolf’s trope to speak about her wish for independence, which has led her “to escape […] from the family circle” by taking a year off to study in France, “a year of freedom – with a room of my own” (87).

Letter 53, Emily S. Judge’s second letter to Woolf in response to *A Room of One’s Own* dated 16 March 1930, formulates the utopian project of using “a fine old Chateau, in Eastern France, near Epernay” to create “a splendid College for Women, on the lines originally started at Girton” (86). Judge’s project, whose initial stage consisted in “try[ing] to get some nucleus, just a kernel, in the shape of women writers to live there with a room of their own and nothing to worry about,” was meant to replicate, in very concrete ways, the ideal of material and intellectual freedom expressed in the essay (86).

More dissonant voices among the respondents raise questions regarding Woolf’s prerequisites for creativity. Gladys Burlton (Letter 39, dated 2nd December 1929), while counting herself among “all the women whose minds you have set in a ferment,” expresses doubts as to “your £500 & a room etc” (68). Using her own experience as evidence, Burlton suggests that work likely to produce “a comfortable income” inevitably impacts on the energy needed to pursue one’s writing ambitions (68). Nevertheless, she finds encouragement in Woolf’s view that “ordinarily intelligent people can by writing exactly what they think about this and that pave the way for the advent of ‘Shakespeare’s sister’” (68).

Some respondents echo Woolf’s observations about the barriers to personal growth encountered by women, internalised as “those inhibitions which thousands of years have rubbed well into their minds” (70). These inhibitions are found to play a role in women’s difficulty to reach Woolf’s ideal of the androgynous mind. Both Eleanor D. Hill writing from

Florence (Letter 41, dated 30 December 1929) and Beatrice Brown writing from Chelsea, London (Letter 42, undated) link the difficulty for women to attain any degree of unselfconsciousness with their problematic status as gendered subjects. Brown, in particular, identifies the cause for this in women's position as outsiders. "Women," she writes, "(apparently) aren't people; they are suspicious strangers, or pets or performing animals" (72, emphasis in the original). Like Woolf, Brown articulates this discrimination spatially, seeing women as deprived of "the right to hold that invisible passport which good men carry through the world simply on the strength of being good people" (72). However, she concedes, "[p]erhaps £500 a year & a room for each would give women this passport" (72).

Echoing Woolf's ideas, some respondents view access to education as one way to women's empowerment. Caroline F. E. Spurgeon's letter from New York, dated 7 November 1929, expresses "the profoundest belief in the potential powers –intellectual & artistic – of women" and an awareness of "how incalculably these powers have been thwarted, cramped or extinguished by circumstances & convention" (65). Spurgeon illustrates this by evoking remarkable mid-Victorian women who overcame such barriers, as well as her own example. As Spurgeon writes, "I began to educate myself at the age of 25, & 17 years later I was the first woman to be elected to a University Chair in England, (English literature, Univ of London), so I know all about it" (65). What the letter does not say is that Spurgeon's and Woolf's paths had already crossed at the turn of the nineteenth century, namely during their studies at King's College London (Jones and Snaith 14). This fact, however, may have escaped them both at the time when the letter was written.[16] New archival evidence at King's College London shows that, contrary to prevailing ideas, Woolf did, in fact, benefit from systematic institutional education for five years, between 1897 and 1901 at King's College Ladies' Department, where Spurgeon herself studied (Jones and Snaith 3-4). However, Woolf

[16]Woolf's diaries and letters do not contain any reference to Spurgeon.

did not take any English literature classes at King's, despite the Department's strength in this area of study (Jones and Snaith 14). Spurgeon did, then "gained a 'First Class at Oxford in the English School,'" and later "became Professor of English Literature in the University of London in 1913 and Head of the Department of English at Bedford College," as well as founder of "the International Federation of University Women in 1919" (Jones and Snaith 14).

A somewhat more ambivalent picture of female intellectual achievement is offered by Letter 44 from the States, dated 12 January 1930, in which Elizabeth Cox Wright articulates the tension between women's pursuit of education and the demands of motherhood and domesticity. Wright introduces herself as "a student of English history" as well as a holder of a doctor's degree, married to an academic and a mother of two (74). Despite her apparent success in juggling work and family, she finds her outlook "poisoned" by "a sense of rebellion" and admits to feeling guilty "when my children catch cold the day I spend at the University" (74-5). Wright's awareness of this inner tension is offered as "evidence […] that women have still, psychologically, a real barrier between them and attainment" (75). The terms in which the reader speaks of this psychological difficulty recall Woolf's caution against "the temptation to anger" as a setback to achieving "perfect integrity" expressed in "Women and Fiction" (*CE*2: 144-5). However, Wright is also critical of Woolf's work, declaring herself "somewhat disappointed" with Woolf's focus on "uneducated women" (75). Overlooking the politics underlying Woolf's choice, Wright urges her to write about the educated woman too, "the woman to whom the theory of relativity is an exciting thought," pointing out that her circle of female friends in London included "doctors, lawyers, writers, bank clerks, and what not" (75). Wright's criticism suggests that, for certain readers, Woolf's outlook suffered from a certain degree of subjectivity, a view supported by the not altogether

unanimous reaction to her 1928 Cambridge talks documented by Rosenbaum ("Towards the Literary History" xvii-xix).

Wright's letter, like other respondents', shows that readers engaged with Woolf's arguments critically, practising the type of reading advocated in an essay such as "How Should One Read a Book?" There, Woolf stresses the importance of the reader's individual response to, and evaluation of, a text: "The only advice […] that one person can give another about reading is to take no advice, to follow your own instincts, to use your own reason, to come to your own conclusions" (*CE*2: 1). Likewise, in "The Patron and the Crocus," she promotes a dialogic reader-text relationship, maintaining that "writing is a method of communication; and the crocus is an imperfect crocus until it has been shared" (*CE*2: 149-50). Thus, Woolf's "non-hierarchical, feminist and politically egalitarian approach to reading," unlike that of "those male modernists who demanded conformity to ostensibly transcendent aesthetic standards," gave common readers the right to respond to texts freely, without the intervention or mediation of "furred and gowned" authorities (Avery and Brantlinger 253). [17]

With one respondent to *A Room of One's Own*, Mary Geraldine Ostle, the dialogue championed by Woolf took an unexpected form. Unbeknownst to Woolf, the inspiration provided by her 1929 essay led Ostle to undertake an editorial project resulting in "giving voice" to a working-class woman with a passion for reading. Evelyn Wilson's *The Note Books of a Woman Alone*, published in 1935, is a uniquely hybrid text, part diary part reading notebook, where Woolf features significantly with a citation from "How Should One Read a Book?" The rest of the chapter attempts to recover part of Ostle's own story, and reveal points of contact between Woolf and her two unknown readers. The following pages tell a story of virtual connections, but Woolf's brief, somewhat dismissive, mention of Ostle's second letter

[17] This is how she pictures prescriptive interventions into common readers' practices – "how to read, what to read, what value to place upon what we read" – in "How Should One Read a Book?" linking authority with dress as she does, very explicitly, in *Three Guineas* (*CE*2: 1).

in her diary – "Miss Osler or some such name writes to thank & praise – my grand work &c &c" – constitutes a helpful reminder as to the dangers of romanticisation (*D*5: 145).

Not So "Common" a Reader: Mary Geraldine Ostle

Mary Geraldine Ostle wrote to Woolf twice.[18] The first letter, a brief but enthusiastic thank you note for "A Room of One's Own," is dated 28 October 1929 and was therefore written within four days from the publication of Woolf's essay. The letter – in which Ostle confesses that the book had proved so absorbing as to make her forget "the time to go to the theatre" – bears her professional address as a secretary and librarian of "The Froebel Society and Junior Schools Association" (63). As the heading indicates, the society's offices were located at 4 Bloomsbury Square, therefore in close proximity to Woolf's own address, and moved even closer in 1932, to 29 Tavistock Square. The coincidence is suggestive of the writer and reader sharing not only similar political views as to women's cause, but also similar locations within the wider geography of the city.

Ostle's second, longer letter, prompted by *Three Guineas*, was written nine years later, on 27 May 1938, when she was fifty-seven years old.[19] The letter recalls the time when she worked for the Froebel Society and details an experience illustrative of the gendered segregation of public space. The story is that of a younger Ostle's commute "from Eltham Park to Charing Cross" when, exceptionally travelling first class, she was met with hostility by the men in the carriage (18). Ostle notes that marital status played a role in men's attitude. Thus, "a ring on the proper finger" would cause less resentment than – in the case of "a buyer for a huge dress firm" – the outward signs of female independence, manifested in the fact that

[18] Ostle's 1929 letter features in Daugherty "Letters from Readers" and her 1938 letter, in Snaith "*Three Guineas* Letters." Therefore, the passages and page numbers cited here refer to the corresponding volume of *Woolf Studies Annual*.

[19] Referring to Woolf's vision of a more egalitarian society in *Three Guineas*, Ostle writes: "I shall not see it in my life time […] I am 57 […] but I think your two books will be the best help women have ever had towards their fight for justice" (18).

"she was able to buy her self the usual comforts that 'belonged' to men" (18). While claiming "no quarrel with men," Ostle puzzles over their attitude towards unmarried women's self-sufficiency, of which she herself is an example (18). As the concluding lines of her letter suggest, she is one such independent single woman, subject to her married sister's disapproval "if I produce a bottle of sherry in my one-room flat" and deemed "extravagant because I know what food to get and how to furnish my room" (19). As an afterthought after the signature, Ostle adds that *A Room of One's Own* had "started" an editorial project, namely the posthumous publication of *The Note Book of a Woman Alone*, the reading notebooks and autobiographical notes of Evelyn Wilson, a single working woman.

As can be inferred from her first letter, Mary Geraldine Ostle belonged to the large category of Woolf's readers who were politically committed.[20] As she wrote to Woolf, in 1929 she was working for the London-based Froebel Society, an educational society inspired by the German pedagogue Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) founded in 1875. According to Kevin J. Brehony, educational movements in England such as that inspired by Froebel were bound up with women's movement which, alongside its suffrage campaign, also aimed at "the removal of legal barriers to women's citizenship and access to secondary and higher education" ("Among Women"). The Froebel movement provided ample training opportunities for women,

> […] such that by 1908, 5480 English women held teaching certificates issued by the National Froebel Union (NFU) and perhaps that number again had received some or all of the necessary Froebel training. At its peak in 1914-15, the London-based Froebel Society and its regional branches enjoyed a membership of approximately 3000 people, of whom 90% were teachers. (Nawrotzki 210)

[20] As Anna Snaith writes, many of Woolf's readers were involved "in suffrage, the W.S.P.U., women's journalism, the league of Nations Union, as well as socialist and pacifist groups" ("Wide Circles" 7).

Mary Geraldine Ostle became a member of the Froebel Society sometime in 1918 or 1919 and left it at the end of 1931 owing to illness, "after twelve years' devoted service" – as a note in the spring 1932 issue of the Society's journal *Child Life* acknowledged ("The Froebel Society News and Notes" 24). The announcement of her departure, made at the Annual Meeting of the Froebel Society held on 5 January 1932 at University College, Gower Street, "would grieve all members," and Ostle would be remembered for "her unfailing kindness and sympathy to all members, and especially to those in any difficulty or trouble" ("The Froebel Society News and Notes" 25). The terms of this announcement, echoed eighteen years later by the obituary published in the *National Froebel Foundation Bulletin* in August 1950, testify to the place that Ostle had come to occupy within the Society, both as a respected worker and as a personality attuned to "the deeper or more immediate needs of others" ("Obituary" 9).[21]

Her involvement with the Society – evidenced by occasional references in the journal *Child Life* as well as the Froebel Society Committee Minutes between 1921 and 1931 – was complex and manifold. Ostle appears to have assumed the position of secretary of the Froebel Society in 1921. She is first mentioned in the Society's minutes as participating in a conference held on 19 March 1921 at 29 Gordon Square, to discuss a "Memorandum prepared by the Association of Head Mistresses and proposed Deputation to the Board of Education." Ostle, alongside other delegates, is "representing the Froebel Society and National Froebel Union."[22] From 1921 onwards, her name appears regularly in the minutes of the numerous meetings held by the Society's committees through to 1931, the year when she relinquished

[21] I am indebted to Jane Read, Head of Year Three BA/BSc Early Childhood Studies, School of Education, Roehampton University, who pointed out the existence of the obituary in her email of 28 January 2010.

[22]The two Froebel bodies were to merge in 1939, giving rise to the National Froebel Foundation (NFF) whose "first efforts […] centred on the dissolution of the old NFU and Froebel Society and the constitution of the new organization from the best parts of both" (Nawrotzki 220).

her position, and, occasionally, beyond.[23] In the "Minutes of the Propaganda Committee Meeting" of 19 October 1922, she is mentioned both in her position as secretary and as one of the two delegates designated to represent the Froebel Society on the Board of the National Froebel Union. Other minutes suggest that she was in charge of the Library alongside her work as a secretary.[24] Towards the end of 1922 and the beginning of 1923 already, Ostle's increasing workload led to suggestions "that the Secretary should advertise for a trained Shorthand Typist" and that her salary be raised "from £225 with bonus of £35, to £275 without bonus" and "in a year's time to £300."[25] Later, when several educational bodies including The Froebel Society and Junior Schools Association formed a common platform entitled the "Federal Lectures Board," Ostle attended its meetings both as a representative of the Froebel Society and secretary. In 1927, in one of the Board's meetings held on Tuesday 29 March, "[i]t was unanimously agreed that an expression of appreciation from the Federal Lectures Board to Miss Ostle for her work as Secretary should be recorded in the Minutes."

Ostle's work for the Society included, among others, advertising the Agency and Library, handling the library accounts and the new acquisitions, dealing with booksellers, helping organise the Summer Schools as well as making arrangements for the Society's lecture series.[26] Her work, however, did not stop there. A holder of the NFU Teacher's Certificate and Trainer's Diploma, she sometimes wrote for *Child Life* and gave lectures on various occasions. One article entitled "A Fortnight in Bad Liebenstein, Thuringia" published in 1925 relates her trip to Germany for the inauguration of a Froebel College in the region

[23]The Finance Committee, the Library and Magazine Committee, the Propaganda Committee (a name extended to "Propaganda, Agency and General Purposes Committee" in 1924).
[24] In the Minutes of the Library and Magazine Committee of 1st December 1924, her name is accompanied by the title "Librarian."
[25] Cf. Minutes of the Finance Committee held on 20 October 1922 and 5 February 1923.
[26] As the letterhead of Ostle's 1929 letter to Woolf indicates, the offices in 4 Bloomsbury Square housed both the "Lending Library" and the "Scholastic Agency for Teachers and Governesses" (Daugherty, "Letters from Readers" 63). According to Kristen D. Nawrotzki, "the Froebel Society's lecture series and summer schools for teachers, parents, headmasters, governesses, school inspectors and nursery nurses in the 1910s and into the 1920s offered people in London and in the provinces a rare chance to interact with a broad array of new and innovative ideas in the field of education and child health, appealing to wide and even international audiences" (211).

where Froebel himself had lived and died.[27] Another article, published in 1927, details the results of a questionnaire about examinations and scholarships to secondary education addressed to "as large a body of teachers as could be reached" ("These Weary Scholarships" 104). Ostle writes "[f]or the Special Committee of Council appointed to deal with the Questionnaire" in a voice that confirms her familiarity with the world of education ("These Weary Scholarships" 108). A lecture entitled "Children's Reading" scheduled to take place on 4th December 1924 led by "Miss M.G. Ostle" features in the provisional Study Circle programme included in the "Minutes of the Propaganda, Agency and General Purposes Committee" of 11 July 1924. Ostle gave another lecture "The Danger of a Teacher's Life" as part of the Study Circle on 30 March 1926, as the journal *Child Life* indicates.[28]

In 1929, the year of her first letter to Woolf, she lectured on "Nursery Literature" on 19 March as part of a series of "Short Lectures for Parents, Teachers and Nurses" held in the Society's offices.[29] In August, she participated in the Froebel Society summer school organised at the Maria Grey Training College, Brondesbury, London, which drew an audience of fifty people "from all parts of the British Isles and Dependencies, and from varied types of schools," with a lecture entitled "The Child's Bookshelf" (Banks, "The Summer School" 79). The same year, her name features twice more in the Society's journal *Child Life* in relation to the "rainy day envelope," an initiative meant to provide financial support for – in the editor's words – "such as have fallen upon evil times" ("Editor's Notes," *Child Life* 32.148: 74). The editor appeals to the readers to contribute to this fund as "a way in which they could strengthen the hands of […] Miss Ostle, who is always giving of herself to teachers, members and non-members" ("Editor's Notes," *Child Life* 32.148: 73-74). In the winter issue, Ostle praises the effect of the editor's plea by announcing that "[t]he Society's 'Rainy Day'

[27] *Child Life*, 27.135 (1925): 84-86.
[28] *Child Life*, 28.136 (1926): 24. This lecture is also mentioned in the Minutes of the Propaganda, Agency and General Purposes Committee meeting of 27 November 1925.
[29] *Child Life*, 32.146 (1929): 7. In 1932, Ostle's "Sharing Makes a Feast: a Christmas play for children and adults" was published by Alexander Moring, London, showing her ongoing interest in children's literature.

envelope has never been so delightfully full before" ("Editor's Notes," *Child Life* 32.149: 107). In her note, she intimates that "[o]ne especially hard case has been entirely made smooth" and reminds her readers that "the need is always there, or rather here, so will those members who have a bit of luck please remember other members not quite so fortunate" ("Editor's Notes," *Child Life* 32.149: 107). These details suggest Ostle's capacity for empathy with those "not quite so fortunate," of whom Evelyn Wilson – whose notebooks she was going to edit and publish in 1935 – was an exemplar.

When Ostle put forth her resignation at the Council Meeting of 14 May 1931, the news of her departure was met with unanimous expressions of appreciation and regret, some in the form of letters from various members of the Society. As one collective letter put it, "Miss Ostle's organising work as Secretary and Librarian is well known and fully appreciated, but her unfailing and understanding of our individual difficultiesis [sic] known only to each one of us."[30] The Council Meeting of November 12, 1931 acknowledges the collection of £31.10.6 from members of the Council towards a present for Ostle as well as the reception of "many letters of appreciation of Miss Ostle's work and admiration of her personality."

As recorded in the minutes, when asked what she would like as a good-bye present, Ostle "expressed a desire for books and for a subscription to a library." The detail is significant, both for understanding Ostle's personality and as an explanation for her endeavour to edit Evelyn Wilson's reading notebooks. During her work as a Librarian, her love and knowledge of books became obvious to Society members who "often commented on the fact that she seemed to know the inside of every book in the Library" ("Obituary" 9). She was, then, an avid reader, just like Evelyn Wilson or Woolf herself. Her interest in books as well as her commitment to the cause upheld by the Froebel Society extended beyond 1931. After relinquishing her position, she accepted the offer to undertake the editorship of the

[30] Letter acknowledged at the Coucil Meeting of 8 October 1931, nearly five months after Ostle's resignation.

Society's journal *Child Life*, which counted among its past editors Marjorie Strachey, one of Lytton Strachey's sisters and an intimate member of Woolf's circle.[31] When Ostle resigned the editorship of the journal in the summer of 1932, she declared herself "particularly anxious not to accept" the money due for her one year's work so as to "be, even in this negative sort of way, of use to the Society" at a time when the journal was not "very profitable."[32]

Mary Geraldine Ostle's story ends here for lack of further records. However patchy, the information available in the National Froebel Foundation Archive offers precious insight into the character and motivations of one of Woolf's many uncommon readers. Ostle's confession that *A Room of One's Own* inspired her to edit Evelyn Wilson's notebooks in order "to express some of the difficulties women labour under" adds to this knowledge, suggesting that the empathy which she may have felt towards Wilson as an individual was coupled with a wider political aim (Snaith, "*Three Guineas* Letters" 19). In Anna Snaith's words, Ostle "rescued Wilson's discarded notebooks and with them a forgotten life" ("Wide Circles" 9).

The "forgotten" or "obscure" life is a recurrent motif in *A Room of One's Own* as well as in Woolf's essays. "Lives of the Obscure," for instance, starts in an unnamed library where "[t]he obscure sleep on the walls, slouching against each other as if they were too drowsy to stand upright" (*CE*4: 120). The books are "those peaceful graves" or "those nameless tombstones" which the librarian seems reluctant to "reopen" (*CE*4: 120). In "How Should One Read a Book?," Woolf maintains that "[e]very literature, as it grows old, has its rubbish-heap, its record of vanished moments and forgotten lives" and that pursuing these "relics" of past lives may yield unexpected rewards: "It may be one letter – but what a great vision it gives! It may be a few sentences – but what vistas they suggest!" (*CE*2: 5).

In the introductory letter to *Life as We Have Known It by Co-Operative Working Women* commissioned by Margaret Llewelyn Davies (included in Woolf's *Collected Essays*

[31] Cf. the Froebel Society's minutes of 1924-1926.
[32] Cf. Council Meeting of June 9, 1932.

as “Memories of a Working Women’s Guild”), Woolf refers to the autobiographical writings in the volume as “only fragments,” “voices” that “are beginning only now to emerge from silence into half-articulate speech” (*CE*4: 148). In a turn of phrase that recalls Ostle’s justification for editing Wilson’s notebooks, Woolf notes that “[t]o express even what is expressed here has been a work of labour and difficulty” derived not least from the material conditions in which “[t]he writing has been done” (*CE*4: 148). While acknowledging the “many limitations” of the pieces in the collection as literary texts, she also detects in them “some qualities even as literature that the literate and instructed might envy” (*CE*4: 146-7). In the same letter, Woolf highlights, among the “other signs of extraordinary vitality of the human spirit” exhibited by the working-class women’s stories, their “hungry appetite” for reading (*CE*4: 144-5). “Such reading,” Woolf explains, “led to argument,” in other words, to the development of a critical mind “humming” with ideas (*CE*4: 145).

The Note Books of a Woman Alone, edited by Mary Geraldine Ostle together with Wilson’s former colleague Geraldine Waife, displays just such an exceptional passion for reading. Introducing Evelyn (Eve) Wilson to the reader, Geraldine Waife writes: “I did not know that there were women, poorly educated […] and yet with a passion for art and literature; who read and re-read books from free libraries, and who went without meals to buy a few more” (viii). The texts cited in *The Note Books* – ranging from classical authors and religious texts to Wilson’s contemporaries, from English to Russian, French, Spanish and Italian literature – testify to the “hungry appetite” for reading which is central to Waife’s recollection of Wilson. As it were, Wilson does not only cite these texts; she also comments on them, weaving into them her own feelings and experiences. This form of appropriation enhances the value of *The Note Books*, as well as the political significance of Ostle’s project of recovery.

The Note Books of A Woman Alone

The Note Books of A Woman Alone, edited by Mary Geraldine Ostle with an introduction by Geraldine Waife, was published in 1935 by the London publishing house J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd.[33] An American edition followed in 1936, published in New York by E. P. Dutton & Co and reviewed in *The New York Times* on 18 October 1936 under the rubric "Books in Brief Review." The short anonymous review starts with a reference to Woolf's 1929 essay:

> A room of her own and £500 a year Virginia Woolf said a woman should have if she was going to write creatively. This odd and appealing little book is the picture (not connectedly the story) of a woman who never had more than £3 a week and who never knew either success or any sort of creation, but to whom a room of her own was a treasure for lasting happiness, at once a stronghold, symbol and literal blessing and comfort in a hard life. (*The New York Times*, 18 October 1936, 9, 26)

Long before the publication of Geraldine Ostle's letter in 2000 uncovered the connection between Woolf and her two readers, the anonymous *New York Times* reviewer perceptively recognized affinities of content between Wilson's *Note Books* and Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.[34] As Snaith notes, had Woolf read *The Note Books*, she "would have found echoes of *A Room of One's Own* all through Wilson's jottings" alongside "confirmation of so many of her ideas about the importance of access to books and libraries for working women" ("Wide Circles" 9). The reason for this is that *The Note Books* are primarily a record of Wilson's reading in the form of quotations, and that the variety and breadth of the literature gathered in the volume proves Wilson's voracious reading.

Ostle's indication that the book was based on "eight fat note books" and her admission to have left out, for practical reasons, part of the material found in them – most of the

[33] As shown later, Geraldine Waife's contribution to *The Note Books* extends beyond the introduction.
[34] In the title of the English edition, "note books" is spelt as two separate words, unlike in the American edition.

"quotations from the classics" and "the poetry that she [Wilson] seemed unable to forget" – suggest that the extent of Wilson's reading was extraordinary by any measure ("Note by the Editor" xiii-xiv).[35] Explaining her editorial choices, Ostle indicates that one of her difficulties lay in the frequent absence of sources, which she attributes to Wilson's reading practices as a working woman with little time and means for securing books: "Eve did not have many opportunities to buy books, or even to borrow books that could be kept any length of time" ("Note by the Editor" xiii). With poetry, the source was often newspapers from which Wilson cut out the poems but "did not always give the name of the fortunate paper, and never the date" ("Note by the Editor" xiii). These details offer precious insight into the heterogeneity of the material gathered in the notebooks. They also explain the book's hybrid nature, underscored by both the English and the American edition. An "odd […] little book," as the American reviewer called it in 1936, *The Note Books* is dubbed an "unusual book, part anthology, part autobiography" on the dust jacket of the English edition. Ostle herself acknowledges its "somewhat amateurish, even very much so at times" character ("Note by the Editor" xiii).

It is, nevertheless, precisely its unusualness that makes *The Note Books* such a compelling object of study. One of the questions that the text invites is that of its genre. Made up of citations, interspersed with comments by Wilson and longer autobiographical fragments, *The Note Books* can be said to belong to life writing as a category which "steps beyond genre boundaries and disciplines, particularly with regard to narrative unity, 'objective' thinking and author/ity" (Verduyn 29). Rather than consider the autobiographical passages separately from the reading notes, using Camelia Elias's understanding of fragments as "performative" and as "acts of literature, acts of reading, acts of writing," I would argue

[35] The practical reasons put forth by Ostle are the availability of the citations "in other anthologies" in the case of the classical sources and "difficulties of copyright" with the poetry ("Note by the Editor" xiii).

that *The Note Books*' unity is performative in nature, residing in the intertextuality of the different constituent fragments (5).

It is relatively difficult to establish the degree to which the structure of *The Note Books* follows the original "authorial" intention. First, Wilson's notebooks were not intended for publication. It is by sheer luck that Wilson's brother decided to send them to Geraldine Waife after his sister's death, and that Waife and Ostle, inspired by Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, decided to publish them.[36] Thus, the book's structure presumably owes much to Ostle and Waife's collaborative work. Prefaced by Waife's introduction and Ostle's editorial note, *The Note Books of A Woman Alone* is divided into twelve different chapters, which function as headings under which Wilson's citations, accompanied by comments and other autobiographical fragments, are gathered thematically.[37] It is tempting to assume that these categories were created by Ostle and Waife. The last chapter's title, with its implication of an external perspective on Evelyn Wilson's life, supports this assumption. Nevertheless, a comment in the "Illness" chapter of *The Note Books* suggests that at least some of the headings were devised by Wilson herself: "I do not know the author of this, I quote from memory. I put the quotation into my Illness section because I dream only when ill" (271). The individual structure of each chapter – a longer "prelude" followed by quotations, comments and autobiographical notes – if not entirely Waife and Ostle's, evinces their intervention. Two of the preludes (to chapter VI "Pain" and chapter VII "Books") – the former entitled "A vagabond in pain", the latter, "A Vagabond goes shopping" – are by Geraldine Waife.[38]

[36] Cf. "Introduction" by Geraldine Waife, ix.

[37] The twelve headings are as follows: I. Women: Their Work; Their Homes, II. Society: Manners, Dress, III. Children and Family Life, IV. Money, V. Vision and Bewilderment, VI. Pain, VII Books, VIII. Friends and Enemies, IX. Old Age, X. Illness, XI Death, XII The End of Eve's Story. Remarkably, some of these categories suggest a quasi-sociological approach to the literary text.

[38] These titles feature in the index but not in the respective chapters. Anecdotally, contradicting the Index on pp. 297-303, the prelude to Chapter IX "Illness" (268-269) is followed by the initials G. W. for Geraldine Waife, which would raise to three the number of preludes authored by Waife. In the copy of *The Note Books of A Woman Alone* in my possession, signed by Ostle and /or Waife, the initials "G.W." are crossed out in blue ink and replaced with "Eve". This mistake is one of several others corrected in blue ink by what looks like the same

Unlike other preludes, these are short pieces of fiction which obliquely point to Geraldine Waife's own literary activity.[39]

The framing of the notebooks by the biographical details provided in the introduction and the editor's note as well as Ostle and Waife's intervention in the text highlight the constructed nature of the autobiographical subject of *The Note Books*. With that caveat, the (discontinuous) personal narrative in the book as well as (what can be assumed to represent) the unifying intention behind Wilson's notes justify reading *The Note Books of A Woman Alone* as an – albeit "odd" or "unusual" – form of life writing. As such, *The Note Books* illustrate what Christl Verduyn, citing Marlene Kadar, has identified as life writing's "two serious intellectual and cultural tasks:" that of "allow[ing] the canonical, or marginally canonical, to be considered alongside the legitimately marginal" and that of "documentation and reconstruction of women's lives" (29). In rescuing Wilson's voice "to express some of the difficulties women labour under" – as Ostle wrote to Woolf, Ostle and Waife subscribe to a clear feminist agenda. As the Personal Narratives Group writes:

> If women's personal narratives both present and interpret the impact of gender roles on women's lives, they are especially suitable documents for illuminating several aspects of gender relations: the construction of a gendered self-identity, the relationship between the individual and society in the creation and perpetuation of gender norms, and the dynamics of power relations between women and men (5).

So how do Ostle and Waife construct Evelyn Wilson? How does Evelyn construct herself as the gendered subject of her notebooks? And how does her negotiation of her gendered identity

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hand as in the inscription at the beginning of the book ("Alice Ogden from her friends Geraldine Waife and MG Ostle 1949").

[39] It is safe to assume that this is the same Geraldine Waife author of two novels, both published in London by Chapman & Hall: *Colleagues. A Novel, etc.* (1923) and *The Scrap Heap* (1924).

– expressed in her autobiographical notes as well as her reading and choice of quotations – recall Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*?

In her introduction to *The Note Books*, Geraldine Waife, who knew Evelyn Wilson personally, details the circumstances in which they met – "at Miss de Burgh's Registry for governesses, nursery nurses, and superior maids" – and her gradual discovery of Wilson's singular personality, her passion for reading, her "intense burning sense of the inequalities in the world" paired with the incapacity "to fight, to snatch, to take *something* out of life" (vii). Alongside her "reading" of Wilson's temperament, Waife also offers factual details about the latter's life as "the second daughter and third child of a family of four," whose father "was a silk manufacturer, well respected in Manchester" (viii). By Waife's account, Wilson had lost her mother at the age of seventeen when she "left her private school" and, under the care of her elder sister, "went out as a nursery governess," an experience described in the prelude to the opening chapter of the book (ix). At her father's death, despite "t[aking] nothing from the estate," she "had saved enough to take a course in stenography," which allowed her to work for Miss de Burgh's agency for twenty-one years, "earning thirty shillings a week" before losing her job and dying "at the age of forty-eight or nine" (ix).

Some of these details resurface in Wilson's autobiographical narrative, gaining depth through psychological self-investigation. Writing herself, Wilson probes her thoughts and emotions with the inquisitiveness which defines her, as she admits in the final pages of *The Note Books*: "I have been asking questions all my life" (276). As *The Note Books* show, her self-interrogation is almost always bound up with an awareness of her gendered identity, confirming that in women's personal narratives, "the story is rarely told without reference to the dynamics of gender" (Personal Narratives Group 5). Through images reminiscent of Woolf's arguments in *A Room of One's Own*, Wilson questions her place in the world, a

questioning which is articulated spatially, revolving around the notions of home, homelessness and belonging.

The first prelude offers a perfect example of this. Elated at the prospect of an independent life after her experience as a governess living in other people's houses, Wilson wonders: "How can I explain to these mothers, to these employers of home-workers, that a room alone, a warmed one to which the employee can go, is a necessity?" (1). A room of one's own – "a place in which I have the right to stay, to be able to move without the criticism of other people" (1), "where I may be myself, and neither apologize for, nor justify, my presence" – is the central trope of the prelude and a recurrent leitmotif in the chapter (7). "My home," she writes elsewhere, "is any room across the door of which I can draw the bolt" (26). In this reformulation of home, solitude becomes a positive value: "I have always wanted alone-ness as a drunkard wants drink" (1). This qualifies to some extent Ostle's interpretation that the notebooks' title, chosen by Wilson herself, signifies that she "felt alone" and "not a part of any scheme of life, and must find her pleasures and consolations alone" (xiii). Although a sense of alienation does filter through Wilson's personal narrative, here, "alone" is empowering, suggestive of the type of material and intellectual freedom which Woolf advocates in *A Room of One's Own*.

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In the light of the story of intersecting reader / writer voices told here, it is tempting to "universalise" Woolf's "room" as the spatial figuration of a single feminist / feminine ideal in the first decades of the twentieth century and beyond. Nevertheless, Woolf's upper-middle-class "room of her own" could not be Wilson's or Ostle's rooms. Women's habitation of space and the material conditions of their lives constituted not one but a multiplicity of experiences. With that caveat, it is important to recognise the resonance of Woolf's arguments for her historical readers revealed by the Monk's House letters and see in it an illuminating

addition to our knowledge of the text's afterlife. In a somewhat different way from the rest of the chapters in this study, the story of the reception of the iconic 1929 essay reaffirms the idea of the interrelationship of public and private, linking histories of private rooms and individual talent with wider aspirations and political commitment.

Chapter 3

Out of Rooms: Imperial Routes and the Impasse of Becoming in *The Voyage Out*

"Let's imagine it's a Wednesday. You're all at luncheon. You sit there, and Aunt Lucy there, and Aunt Clara here" (*VO* 243). Under Terence Hewet's hypnotic gaze, Rachel Vinrace re-creates the atmosphere of the "rather […] nice" but "dingy" house and its drawing-room – "a room without definite character, being neither typically and openly hideous, nor strenuously artistic, nor really comfortable" – in surprising detail for someone prone to daydreaming and a certain lack of adherence to things (*VO* 243). Summoned by Terence's urge, scenes and objects from Rachel's domestic life in England – the Victorian furniture accumulated by several generations, the pictures on the walls, including "one or two portraits of fathers and grandmothers," the "very ugly yellow china stand […] called a dumb waiter" – all emerge with unexpected clarity, filling the space of the South American vastness with images of home (*VO* 243). They also give Terence a sought-after taste of women's "curious silent unrepresented life" behind the walls of identical houses (*VO* 245). This evocation of an English domestic interior against the "infinite sun-dried earth" (*VO* 237) of South America halfway through *The Voyage Out* is one of many passages in the novel suggestive of the Lefebvrian idea of the "ambiguous continuity" of spaces (*The Production of Space* 87). Rachel's voyage out of the familiar terrain of her aunts' Richmond rooms and the boundaries of national space occasions an exploration of the ways in which these various spaces – domestic, national, transnational – interact and inform the practices and discourses of the English travellers on the South American continent as well as "the interiority of [their] psychic space" (Thacker 5).

As the existing literature demonstrates, the topos of travel in Woolf's debut novel has provided fertile ground for critical examination. As readings of the novel move away from

interpretations mainly concerned with the introspective nature of the protagonist's voyage to approaches that consider the relevance of the colonial context, the book yields new depths and a political awareness largely overlooked in early critical accounts. This chapter contributes to more recent discussions by examining the extent to which the narrative of Rachel's formation as a female "English subject of modernity" is bound up with contemporary views on women, Empire and the nation.[1] Against the backdrop of Empire, Rachel's voyage appears similar to other turn-of-century travel narratives whose outcome resides in a form of "mutation" (Tratner 86).[2] Thus, the novel confirms Jed Esty's argument that "colonialism disrupts the bildungsroman and its humanist ideals, producing jagged effects on both the politics and poetics of subject formation" (73). In the colonial context, Rachel's voyage outside the boundaries of national space deflates its own potential for freedom, showing the difficulty for women to position themselves within or without the framework provided by patriarchal discourses.

An examination of Woolf's notes on various travels in the early journals shows the appeal that spatial dislocation held for her imagination, not least because it allowed her to take critical distance from, and interrogate, the notions of home and the nation. As Youngjoo Son has noted, the analogy between home and the island-nation is a common trope in nineteenth-century texts (86). Woolf also uses this parallel, but as Gillian Beer puts it, her "quarrel with patriarchy and imperialism gave a particular complexity to her appropriations of the island story" (150). The comparison between the prison-like interior of the house and the prison-like contours of the island-nation suggested by several passages from the early diaries and *The*

[1] I am using the title phrase of Alan O'Shea's introductory chapter to *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity*, edited by Mica Nava and Alan O'Shea, London: Routledge, 1996. Explaining modernity and modernisation, O'Shea notes the globalising character of modernity and points out that modernisation "was inextricably tied to imperialism" (14).

[2] Critics have shown Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to be an important model for Woolf's narrative. Marianne DeKoven's joint reading of *The Voyage Out* and *Heart of Darkness* in *Rich and Strange* is one such example. Noting that Rachel's voyage was initially to South Africa, Michael Tratner cites both Conrad and Henry Stanley's journal *In Darkest Africa* as sources for it (86). Tratner considers Rachel's story closer to Stanley's vision in which stasis / inability to move parallels the Conradian image of "degeneration" (86).

Voyage Out illustrates Woolf's critical stance. The parallel underscores the constant tension throughout the novel between what Karen R. Lawrence has identified as the conflicting poles of travel literature, namely "a desire for escape and a sense that one can never be outside a binding cultural network" (19).

Lawrence's notion of a "binding network" is suggestive for my reading here. One way in which the novel conveys the idea of Rachel's development being hindered by spatio-ideological constraints is through its emphasis on routes. The recurrence of this trope in the novel foregrounds "spatial practices" of colonisation and economic circulation, from the maritime trajectories of ships travelling, like the *Euphrosyne*, to far-off corners of the globe in search of raw materials, to Santa Marina's layered history of conquest and the English travellers' own disturbing "cross-cultural encounters."[3] Conduits of ideological circulation, routes connect the different spaces in the novel, home and away, blocking the possibility of genuine growth for the female protagonist.

Rachel Vinrace's progress along the prescribed route for women – including marriage and the discovery of her own sexuality – is another key to a reading of routes in the novel. Unlike other fictional characters such as Henry James's heroines or the protagonist of E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View* who travelled to Europe in preparation of marriage on what was then known as the European tour, Rachel voyages to a fictional imperial colony, a place of newness away from European landscapes and traditions.[4] The choice of Santa Marina emphasises the subversive dimension of Rachel's voyage, prefiguring in a way the novel's ultimate transgression – the death of its heroine and, therefore, the denial of a conventional ending such as Rachel's marriage to Terence. This transgression is also symbolic of the young

[3] I am alluding to Carey J. Snyder's recent study *British Fiction and Cross-Cultural Encounters: Ethnographic Modernism from Wells to Woolf* (2008) which reads a series of modernist texts including *The Voyage Out* in the context of the rise of the fieldwork method of participant-observation in ethnographic studies at the beginning of the twentieth century. Snyder argues that these texts both adopt and subvert the methods of fieldwork ethnography, showing the disturbing potential of cross-cultural encounters for the (ethnographic) observer.

[4] Woolf reviewed Forster's *The Longest Journey* and *A Room with a View* "while writing her own novel" (Briggs, *Virginia Woolf* 7).

writer voyaging away from the constraints of traditional writing, whose limits she set out to test in her debut novel.

Early Travels

Woolf's notes on her travels in the period preceding, or concomitant with, the composition of *The Voyage Out* provide valuable insight into the experiences on which she drew to create the fictional voyage to South America in her debut novel. They also show the imaginative resources of geographical displacement, whose potential and limits are explored in *The Voyage Out*. As Jan Morris points out, despite not being "a spectacular traveller, nor a natural wanderer" (4), Woolf "liked the idea of travel and its mechanics" (7). It is commonly known that in the years previous to the publication of *The Voyage Out* in 1915, she had travelled to Portugal, Spain, Greece, Turkey, France and Italy.

Travel occupied her imagination from an earlier date, as several sketches gathered in the section entitled "Netherhampton House, Salisbury" of the early journals reveal. Despite being concerned with the Stephen siblings' discovery of the countryside surrounding Netherhampton House, the family's holiday location in the summer of 1903, the narrative makes consistent use of the trope of exploration in terms evocative of transnational travel. Thus, the opening of the second piece in the series, "Wilton – From Outside the Walls," reads: "we set off after breakfast to find out our position in the world" (*PA* 188). This initial exploratory urge suggesting a larger-scale enterprise than the young Stephens' actual walks across the countryside is echoed several pages later in the indication that "[w]e are still exploring" (*PA* 190). Here, young Virginia narrates a walk across the water meadows with "Nessa," which takes on an aura of real adventure and risky undertaking, as illustrated by the encounter with "male rustic voices, alarming to pedestrians of the womanly sex" (*PA* 190). In this short episode, the risks of exploration are humorously cast in gendered terms. In

anticipation of the exchange with the men working in the field, the two sisters decide to play down their vulnerability "by asking boldly our way out" (*PA* 190). One man's mocking benevolence – "'Your [sic] fairly lost, you are' […] 'You dont [sic] mean to say you've lost the road in broad daylight'" – underscores the two young women's inadequacy as would-be explorers (*PA* 190).

The interest of these early texts lies less in their attempting a form of travel writing – conventionally understood as detailed and faithful description of places and people – and more in the personal reactions and occasional critical musings on place, history and national identity generated by the sight of unfamiliar landscapes.[5] Thus, the discovery of the Southern countryside leads young Virginia to think that "the feudal spirit in England is not yet dead" (*PA* 190) and results in a certain weariness with "so much ancient stone" (193), hence a perceptible tension between the (sometimes resented) peacefulness of the English countryside and her "craving […] for the bareness & warmth & brilliance of a foreign land" (189).

The passage of the Romany caravan recorded in "Wilton Fair," the last sketch preceding the family's return to London, evokes precisely the promise of exotic encounters and unboundedness of the self made possible through spatial – and therefore psychological and cultural – dislocation. The sight of "a whole caravan of gipsies" on their way to Wilton for the following day's fair occasions the confession that "I never see a gipsy cart without longing to be inside it" (*PA* 208). The narrator then explains this longing for a nomadic, uprooted experience, by contrasting the caravan's mobility with the fixity of a modern house:

> A house that is rooted to no one spot but can travel as quickly as you change your mind, & is complete in itself is surely the most desirable of houses. Our modern house with its cumbersome walls & its foundations planted deep in the

[5]According to Jan Morris, Woolf's records of her various travels eschew the conventions of travel writing in their conscious dismissal of, in Woolf's own terms, "descriptive writing" and their lack of "a proper balance between description and self-revelation" (1). Although sketchy, impressionistic and elliptical, they show a rare sensibility to place which, in Morris's view, underlies her writing in general, to the extent that "so much of Virginia Woolf's writing is travel writing in her own kind" (3).

> ground is nothing better than a prison; & more & more prison like does it become the longer we live there & wear fetters of association & sentiment, painful to wear – still more painful to break. (*PA* 208)

Here, the solid boundaries of the house represent a physical and psychological obstacle to one's freedom of movement, triggering both the wish to escape and a form of dependency. In contrast, the Romany caravan – in Alison Light's words, "an early version of a 'room of one's own'" – successfully configures a space that is at once bounded, therefore protective, and mobile (42).[6] Read in conjunction with the thoughts on English history generated by the exploration of the countryside, the caravan – evocative of an identity defined by movement and no clear geographical boundaries – epitomises a form of mobility which implicitly questions "the concept of a superior English national identity which secures privacy and enclosure" (Son 86).

Woolf's trip to Lisbon and Spain with Adrian in the spring of 1905 was to satisfy the longing for "the warmth & brilliance of a foreign land" expressed in 1903. "[T]hink of orange trees, with oranges, and every other kind of tree with large green leaves, and all the blossoms you can think of," she writes of Granada in a letter to Violet Dickinson dated 24 April 1905 which, although composed in London, continues the narrative of the trip to Spain begun in a previous letter (*L*1: 187).[7] In the diary entry of 8 April, however, she notes that, despite the exotic beauty of names such as Estremadura and Andalusia, "the country is not beautiful; for the most part, flat, & treeless, & the sun was hot" (*PA* 262). Some sights, like Seville Cathedral or Alcázar – "a splendid gilt & mosaic Moorish building" – do not have the

[6] This passage can also be read as an indication of Woolf's interest in various means of transport in general, "from the horse and carriage to the push-bike to the Orient Express to the motor car" (Morris 7). Wendy Gan (2009) has recently added to the literature on Woolf and the car by viewing the latter as "a room of one's own" in its capacity to provide temporary privacy outside the home for women of the modernist period (see the chapter "Public Privacy: Women, the City and the Car" 47-75, especially pages 64-66).

[7] It is in this other letter, dated 10 April 1905, that Woolf inadvertently uses the phrase which would later become the title of her first novel: "we discovered on the voyage out that we ought to have booked passage on the return boat" (*L*1:186).

expected effect on the traveller's sensibility (*PA* 263). Every now and then, images of home make their way into the description, like the "rain of pure English blood pouring outside" or "the greenest shade, as of great English trees, filtering a Southern sun" (*PA* 263-4).

The trip to Greece and Turkey, undertaken by the Stephen siblings the following year with unforeseen tragic consequences for the family, held even more appeal to Woolf's imagination, due to her long-standing interest in Greek and the culture of Ancient Greece. The preparations, both "intellectual and imaginative" involved "por[ing] over maps and itineraries" and "tr[ying] to work out the relation between 'present Greeks and the classical Greece'" (Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 227). If, as Hermione Lee notes, the trip to Greece was an opportunity to consider the clash between Ancient and modern Greece and the idea of Greekness, it also provided the geographical distance necessary for the travellers to reflect back on England and Englishness (*Virginia Woolf* 228). Various passages reveal the way in which the unfamiliar is repeatedly filtered, and made familiar, through images of home. During a visit to Epidauros, the countryside recalls Cornwall, despite the lack of any "sign of our snug English civilisation" (*PA* 330). Similarly, "the narrow streets of Athens" remind the travellers of St. Ives (*PA* 330). In the piece entitled "Mycenae," a stop at an inn offers them a glimpse into "England in the 14th Century" (*PA* 335). Later on, "a square white house" welcomes them into what feels almost like "an English drawing room," where "for the first time Greece becomes an articulate human place, homely & familiar, instead of a splendid surface" (*PA* 335).

This negotiation of abroad through home can also be seen in Woolf's later writings, for instance in the notes about the trip to Ireland in the spring of 1934 undertaken with Leonard, where she reads Dublin through London. This reading, made up of virtual topographic juxtapositions as in the parallel between Merrion Square and Bedford Square or Grafton Street and Sloane Street, is complicated by considerations about the relation between

England and Ireland, and Dublin's condition as a post-colonial site. To Woolf, this condition consists in impoverishment and lack of authenticity – "no luxury, no creation, no stir, only the dregs of London, rather wish-washy as if suburbanised" – so that in her own words, "if I were Irish, I should wish to belong to the Empire" (*D*4: 215). Mr and Mrs Rowlands, a couple that the Woolfs met at Glenbeith Hotel on 2 May 1934 during the same tour, illustrate this nostalgia for Ireland's colonial past by declaring emphatically: "Oh yes, we believe in the British Empire" (*D*4: 211). In *The Years*, the novel she was writing at the time, Woolf ascribes this attitude to Delia's Irish husband, Patrick, "the most King-respecting, Empire-admiring of country gentlemen" (292). Speaking about the state of Ireland in the "Present Day" section of the novel, which takes place sometime in the early 1930s, Patrick thinks that "our new freedom is a good deal worse than our old slavery" (*TY* 292). Although in her diary notes Woolf qualifies some of her previous criticism of the Irish by acknowledging that "they may have a spirit in them somewhere," she goes on to draw a desolate picture of life in Ireland as hollow and likely to "lower the pulse of the heart" (*D*4: 215-6).

These examples confirm that the home or *oikos* provides the stable point of reference against which the unfamiliar is apprehended (Van Den Abbeele xviii). Moreover, they also reveal the limitations that one's cultural mindset imposes on encounters with other spaces. Despite this shortcoming, whilst abroad is read through images of home, travel also entails the defamiliarisation of the familiar, allowing the traveller to take critical distance from home. In the context of the renewed interest in ethnography and anthropology at the beginning of the twentieth century, Carey J. Snyder reads this as a manifestation of what, following the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, she calls the "self-nativizing" mode, consisting in "turning an ethnographic eye back on the home culture and using 'extravagant otherness' as a means of 'self-critique'" (98).

As a passage in "Mycenae" (the 1906 sketch on Woolf's Greek travels) shows, taking critical distance from the home culture involves a muddled emotional and intellectual mechanics. On the one hand, geographical distance generates a form of longing which "will feed on names, so that the simple word Devon is better than a poem" and "six lines of description […] will raise tears," a feeling hastily dissociated from being "patriotic" (*PA* 345).[8] On the other hand, England's domestic concerns and political controversies take on an air of unreality so that "it is amusing to read the newspapers & find how little interest it is possible to take in all the frizzling & bubbling that goes on still in our island" (*PA* 345). Politics is reduced to mere semantics – "traitors & imperialists are nothing more than names" – while *The Times* becomes "the private sheet of a small colony of islanders, whose noise is effectively shut up in their prison" (*PA* 345).

The imagery employed in this extract anticipates the terms in which the characters of *The Voyage Out* experience their departure from England. Once at sea, they see London "as a circumscribed mound" (*VO* 13) while England itself appears as "a very small island, […] a shrinking island in which people were imprisoned" (29). As Gillian Beer has argued, the identification of England with an island is "an unwavering [fiction] among English writers and other English people"; the island provides "the perfect form in English cultural imagining" of a "[d]efensive, secure, compacted, even paradisal – a safe place" (*Virginia Woolf* 154). Drawing on studies of the Victorian period, Youngjoo Son sees the explicit link between the different tropes of home, nation and the island in nineteenth century texts as evidence of a similar "valorization of protection, enclosure, safety" (86). As the citations above indicate, Woolf undercuts these positive connotations by associating the nation / island with a prison, albeit in a half-affectionate tone. She thus foregrounds her critique through "[t]he deflating of a grandiose image of an imperial nation" (Snyder 105). Carey J. Snyder

[8] This early example of reluctance to endorse any form of patriotism is in line with Woolf's and the Bloomsbury Group's later suspicion of patriotism as entangled with militarist and patriarchal values.

reads the departure scene in *The Voyage Out* as an example of "[t]he self-nativizing tendency of the novel": like in the extract from *A Passionate Apprentice*, "[t]he impression of the smallness or strangeness of the nation is reinforced by a series of images that figure England or London as increasingly diminutive" (105).

The prison imagery running through these different texts, from the prison-like house in "Wilton Fair" to the prison-like island-nation in "Mycenae" and *The Voyage Out*, highlights the physical and cultural constraints of location as opposed to the sense of expansion inherent to transnational movement. However, as in the passage above, where England as "place […] keeps its magic; so strong that it seems to send shocks across the water," in *The Voyage Out* too, the sense of detachment engendered by distance is not devoid of ambivalence (*PA* 345). The thoughts of the English people landed on South American soil often travel back to England, drawing imaginary routes and points of contact between the familiar space of home and the space of alterity which throws into question "all their constructed rules and traditions" (Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 226).

A striking example of this features in chapter XVI of the novel, which opens on Rachel and Terence's reaction to the vista unfolding before them from the top of a cliff. The view of "a vast expanse of land" stripped of any familiarity "gave them a sensation which is given by no view, however extended, in England," evoking a layered history of successive civilizations which the young couple finds unsettling (*VO* 237). The passage can be read as an allusion to Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, a focus of conversation in an earlier scene, and a hint at the fragility of the British Empire itself. Unsurprisingly, the idea of "the races of men chang[ing] from dark savages to white civilized men, and back to dark savages again" constitutes a "prospect uncomfortably impersonal and hostile" to Rachel and Terence, whose response is to turn to the sea – a literal conduit of thought, taking them away

from “the infinite sun-dried earth” back to “the mouth of the Thames […] and the roots of the city of London” (*VO* 237).

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Woolf’s choice of a voyage out of England as the subject matter of her debut novel is symbolic of her desire to take distance from the socio-cultural space of home, as well as the writing tradition within which she aspired to create her own place. The voyage represents a common trope in Western tradition, associated with positive values such as “progress, the quest for knowledge, freedom as freedom to move, self-awareness as an Odyssean enterprise, salvation as a destination to be attained” (Van Den Abbeele xv). As Janis P. Stout observes, travel has even greater significance in female writing as a means to “signify rupture, the breaking not only of personal and conventional walls but of whole social structures and sets of assumptions” (2). Thus, travelling equates with “call[ing] an existing order (whether epistemological, aesthetic, or political) into question by placing oneself ‘outside’ that order, by taking a ‘critical distance’ from it” (Van Den Abbeele xiii). Yet, as Georges Van Den Abbeele maintains, “[t]he economy of travel requires an *oikos* […] in relation to which any wandering can be *comprehended* (enclosed as well as understood)” (xviii). The relation between the *oikos*, the “home” as stable point of reference, and away is constitutive of the voyage, to the extent that “travel can only be conceptualized in terms of the points of departure and destination, and of the (spatial and temporal) distance between them” (xviii). As this chapter shows, *The Voyage Out* explores precisely the problematic relationship between home and away: unlike for the male traveller, the home that the woman left behind was a site of tensions derived from the constraints of domesticity and patriarchal ideology.

As Karen R. Lawrence has documented, before the advent of mass tourism in the twentieth century, travel enabled women to leave the domestic sphere to which they were bound, therefore “supplying a set of alternative models for woman’s place in society” based

on “a more dynamic model of woman as agent, as self-mover” (18). However, as Lawrence admits, one cannot establish a clear-cut opposition between adventure and domesticity (xii). Nor can the freedoms of travel be entirely separated from the “cultural constraints” enmeshed in the act of travelling, so that “travel literature explores a tension between the thrilling possibilities of the unknown and the weight of the familiar” (19).

Against the background of colonialism, the woman traveller’s unconscious allegiance to what Lawrence calls one’s “binding cultural network” raises complex questions (19). In the context of Empire, “the colonial frontier promised female subjects new modes of subjectivity,” which could lead to challenging the foundations of domestic ideology (Gikandi 122). The potential of colonialism to undermine “the very categories in which this ideology was formulated” was, however, closely entwined with the danger that women might replicate and reinforce imperial practices (Gikandi 121). In *Three Guineas*, Woolf acknowledges that woman’s desire to leave behind “the education of the private house with its cruelty, its poverty, its hypocrisy, its immorality, its inanity” made her susceptible to “any fascination however fatal,” including “our splendid Empire” (208).

This ambivalence about women’s travel in the spaces of Empire can be seen in *The Years* where travel is presented as an alternative to domestic life through the character of Eleanor. After her father’s death, the latter has a choice between replicating the model of domesticity epitomised by Abercorn Terrace by “tak[ing] another house” or the freedom to “go to India, at last” (*TY* 156). The “Present Day” section of the novel finds her looking “very vigorous” and “tanned with the sun” after a trip to India (*TY* 224). More than an occasional traveller, she appears to have taken up travel as a natural complement to her independent life “in a sort of workman’s flat at the top of six flights of stairs” (*TY* 242). Moreover, she has further travelling ambitions such as a planned visit to China or the desire to see Tibet. In Peggy’s words, “[g]allivanting off to India” has lost its aura of adventure for Eleanor in an

age where "[t]ravel's so easy. You just take a ticket; just get on board ship" (*TY* 245). Her nonchalance about what to others seems an exotic destination – "India's nothing nowadays. […] what I want to see before I die […] is something different […] another kind of civilization" – is slightly ambiguous (*TY* 245). If her dismissal of India is read as a sign of condescension, her Indian outfit in the last chapter of the novel suggests a form of appropriation of India's otherness, artificially reproduced at Delia's party as mere spectacle. Similarly, the "Indian in a pink turban" whom Peggy assumes to be "one of Eleanor's Indians" may be seen as a human trophy from her travels (*TY* 259). Nevertheless, as chapter 6 shows, Eleanor seems genuinely keen to transcend class and ethnic barriers.

The sense of agency underlying Eleanor's travels in *The Years* is absent from Rachel's voyage in Woolf's debut novel. Although, according to Willoughby Vinrace, his daughter wanted to take part in the voyage and he "agreed because she wished it" (*VO* 92), his ship has a primarily commercial function which consists in "carry[ing] dry goods to the Amazons, and rubber home again" (38). From the start, Rachel's voyage lacks the markings of a self-propelled quest-like voyage, although self-discovery, albeit flawed, is part of its outcome. Nor does Rachel come across as the self-sufficient subject of the quest; rather, she seems an *object* of travel, conveyed to South America by her father. One way in which the novel suggests this is by denying Rachel the central position in the departure scene, a powerful trope in women's narrative of travel, construed as breaking loose from prescribed gender roles (Stout 2). Unlike Helen and Ridley Ambrose, the heroine "begins her voyage from the less solid ground of the vessel itself" (E. Johnson 65). The reader's first glimpse of Rachel catches her in a passive – if somewhat feverish – attitude "[d]own in the saloon of her father's ship" where "she stood waiting her uncle and aunt nervously" (*VO* 8).

Moreover, the personal growth that the voyage is expected to bring about is entangled with Willoughby's personal designs for his daughter. For the father, this growth does not

entail anything too radical since Willoughby does not support "these modern views" – which Helen Ambrose promotes later, criticising traditional education – and appears pleased with his daughter being "a nice quiet girl, devoted to her music" (*VO* 92). His plans for Rachel – to turn her into a social hostess with Helen's help – is closely entwined with his own political ambitions centred on a career in Parliament, in which a more socially apt "Rachel could be of great help" (*VO* 93). As Rachel embarks on a voyage that takes her out of the domestic rooms of patriarchy to new territories and realms of experience, the desired outcome of the voyage for Willoughby lies precisely in her better conforming to patriarchal models of femininity.

Thus, the departure scene casts Rachel in the role of the unformed young woman, having to constantly redefine herself in the light of new experiences, to be moulded in part for her father's purposes. Her subjection to the latter's will is suggestively conveyed by Helen's "suspect[ing] him of nameless atrocities with regard to his daughter, as indeed she had always suspected him of bullying his wife" (*VO* 20). This intimation of secret domestic violence is later mirrored by his treatment of native people (detailed by Willoughby himself in a letter to Helen). These are seemingly incidental details in the novel but, as Louise DeSalvo has shown, the earlier version of the novel known as *Melymbrosia* paints an explicitly darker picture of the father as a threat to Rachel. There, the terms in which he is described are closely related to the portrayal of Richard Dalloway so that "Willoughby […] is identified with Dalloway as the pursuer in both Rachel's fantasy and delirium" (DeSalvo 58).[9] The association between the two men in the earlier version of the novel and the conjunction between Willoughby's treatment of women and the natives in *The Voyage Out* reinforce the idea of a link between colonial and patriarchal practices.

[9] As DeSalvo explains, "The image of the pursuer is used in Rachel's phantasy after Dalloway's kiss and again in the delirium preceding her death" (58).

"Free of Roads": Voyaging *Out*

The opening chapters set up a pattern replicated throughout the novel, which consists in outlining, then deflating, moments of potential freedom in the narrative of Rachel's voyage out of England. These moments problematise the relation between home and away, gesturing towards points of convergence between the life left behind and the alternative spaces and modes of being configured by the moving ship.

This is first conveyed through the contrast between the characters' point of departure, the busy city of London, and the moment of exhilaration at sea when the ship seemingly sails "across an empty universe" (*VO* 29). On the surface, leaving behind the metropole abuzz with economic activity entails leaving behind the material signs of civilisation – being "free of roads, free of mankind" (*VO* 23). Nevertheless, repeated allusions to empire and the Dalloways' presence on board the *Euphrosyne* function as a reminder of the imperial ethos, "the dispersion of the best ideas over the greatest area," undercutting the connotation of movement away from spatio-ideological constraints (*VO* 67). This is reinforced by the emphasis on routes in the novel, from London's labyrinthine network to the trajectories of ships travelling to the far-off corners of the globe.

The opening scene, which takes the Ambroses from the West End to the East End through the maze of London streets bustling with the tumult of "the shooting motor cars, […] the thundering drays, the jingling hansoms, and little broughams," highlights the novel's concern with routes and the ideas which underpin this concern (*VO* 5). The route followed by the couple to reach the point of departure is the opposite to that configured in the *London Scene* essays of 1931 and 1932 which "t[ake] her readers on a London tour, from the Docks to Oxford Street […] to the 'great' houses and churches of London" (Snaith and Whitworth 24). The Ambroses leave behind "the flats and churches and hotels of Westminster" (*VO* 4) to enter "a great manufacturing place" (6) where it becomes apparent that "London is the city of

innumerable poor" (7). By the end of their journey, the wide streets of the West End have given way "to a cobbled lane steaming with smells of malt and oil and blocked by wagons" and what appears to be "a world exclusively occupied in feeding wagons with sacks" (*VO* 7). The sacks, an allusion to the circulation of raw materials making possible the processes of production in the great city, evoke the remote spaces of Empire as well as the economic motives behind the *Euphrosyne*'s voyage. For Linden Peach, the description indicates that "the novel […] 'reads' the social organisation of England according to a model of imperialism" (*Virginia Woolf* 49). In his view, the scene anticipates the characters' journey up the Amazon later on in the novel, making "the relationship between the West and the East End [...] analogous to that between the centre and the colonies" (*Virginia Woolf* 49).[10]

This allusion to the economic interests of the capital in the far-off corners of the Empire in the beginning of the novel suggests that Rachel's voyage may take her away from England but not from "the nature of Englishness, masculinity and empire" (Peach, *Virginia Woolf* 49). The oblique critique expressed here is reminiscent of Leonard Woolf's anti-imperialist work, *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (1920), where he argued that the main drive behind the expansion of the British Empire by the end of the nineteenth century was economic interest (Phillips 58). However, Woolf's manifest "attention to imperial economics" in *The Voyage* Out pre-dates Leonard's books on imperialism by several years (Snaith "'The Exhibition is in Ruins': Virginia Woolf and Empire" 7).[11]

The urban image of accumulation resulting from a focus on movement, sound and smell contrasts with the characters' perspective of the great city once the ship sails off. From the *Euphrosyne*'s deck, London becomes "a swarm of lights with a pale yellow canopy

[10] Michael Tratner draws a similar analogy, noting that the Ambroses' progress through the East End is "[t]he first 'voyage out' in this novel" (87). As Tratner observes, "Around the turn of the century, numerous writers described the East End as an uncharted wilderness in which such a mass of people were breeding that they formed essentially a sea on which England floated" (87).

[11] When doing the final revisions to the novel, Woolf may also have had in mind Leonard's novel *The Village in the Jungle*, published in 1913, drawing on his experience as a colonial administrator in Ceylon.

drooping above it" (*VO* 12). Fixed location compares negatively to the mobility of the ship; thus, "[i]t seemed dreadful that the town should blaze for ever in the same spot […] as a circumscribed mound, eternally burnt, eternally scarred," although Rachel finds the sight "beautiful" (*VO* 13). As the ship sails on, the city shrinks, as through a zoom lens, to "two lines of buildings […], square buildings and oblong buildings placed in rows like a child's avenue of bricks" (*VO* 7). The simile emphasises the distance that mediates the characters' perspective, setting the scene for the climactic moment when, out at sea, "the same exhilaration at their freedom ran through them all" (*VO* 24). Underlying this short-lived sense of freedom at sea is the collapse of geographical landmarks as illustrated by the image of the shrinking continents: "Europe shrank, Asia shrank, Africa and America shrank, until it seemed doubtful whether the ship would ever run against any of those wrinkled little rocks again" (*VO* 29).

The image of the *Euphrosyne* "moving by her own power and sustained by her own resources" across the blank space of the sea lends itself to two very different readings (*VO* 30). On the one hand, being "free of roads" can be read as the temporary deletion not only of material paths but also of the spatial practices underlying them, including colonial practices of conquest and annexation. Thus, the characters' freedom from roads would suggest the temporary bracketing off of the colonial context and its adjacent processes of power, which in turn enhances the illusion of Rachel's voyage as free from any ideological undercurrent. Viewed in this light, the ship at sea constitutes a limbo space, a space of possibility suggestive of Rachel's own self in formation. On the other hand, the sense of empty space experienced by the ship's passengers may be read as evocative of something more problematic, namely the

colonisers' representation of unknown territory as blank / negative space, echoed later on in relation to the vast South American landscape (Spurr 92-93).[12]

Thus, the freedom derived from the absence of any visible traces of civilisation is replete with ambiguity, which is reflected in the description of the ship itself. The *Euphrosyne* recalls Michel Foucault's definition of the ship as "heterotopia par excellence:" "a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea" ("Of Other Spaces" 27). Not only do the characters feel totally cut off from the rest of the world as if all geographical landmarks were obliterated, but they also display to the observer's eye a form of strangeness that is explicitly associated with their isolation on the ship. In a letter to a friend, Clarissa Dalloway comments on this strangeness thus: "How long they've all been shut up in this ship I don't know […] but one feels as though one had boarded a little separate world, and they'd never been on shore, or done ordinary things in their lives" (*VO* 49).[13]

Clarissa's remark, however, springs less from an accurate observation of the *Euphrosyne* and its passengers, and more from a romanticising impulse. In fact, life on the ship displays patterns of behaviour and power relations characteristic of life ashore. The episode of Mrs Chailey's "rebellion," triggered by the inadequacy of sheets and her dissatisfaction with her cabin, reproduces stereotypical master-servant relations, with Rachel having to play the role of the indignant but decisive mistress. Despite what the novel highlights as her social awkwardness, in this scene, Rachel displays the efficiency of a seasoned mistress of the house, "simultaneously and miraculously solv[ing]" the problem of both room and sheets, all the while resenting the fact that "a woman of fifty should behave like a child [...] because she wanted to sit where she had no leave to sit" (*VO* 26). In the end,

[12]David Spurr lists twelve interconnected "rhetorical modes" or "conceptual categories" including those of appropriation and negation, which consisted in viewing unknown territory as empty and in need of domestication (3-4).

[13] In the passage, Richard Dalloway seizes his wife's unfinished letter and reads it "without asking leave," which is telling of the power relation between husband and wife (*VO* 51).

Mrs Chailey's resistance is subdued, and a semblance of homely comfort recreated in a different cabin, in spite of her conviction that "[t]he world no longer cared about her, and a ship was not a home" (*VO* 26). Rachel's dismissal of the older woman's behaviour as a mere childish tantrum perfectly conveys her position of power in relation to the servant forced into a form of mobile homelessness by the voyage to South America.

Gender relations on board ship are equally reminiscent of domestic intercourse, as shown by several scenes in the opening chapters of the novel. Women, deemed "highly trained in promoting men's talk without listening to it," are cast in the role of nurturers and enablers (*VO* 12). Mr Ambrose and Mr Pepper's smoking cigars in the living-room "oblivious of all tumult" as if they were back in 1875 Cambridge – observed by Helen and Rachel "through a chink in the blind" – illustrates this stereotypical distribution of gender roles (*VO* 13). Helen's efforts to meet her scholar husband's requirements for comfort while he was "pacing up and down, his forehead all wrinkled" is another suggestive example (*VO* 27).[14] As Jane Wheare points out, most of the female characters in the novel are portrayed as "satellites of the men with whom they are linked" while the men are shown to "make unreasonable demands for sympathy upon the women with whom they come into contact" (18). According to Wheare, the exceptions are, significantly, either single (Miss Allan and Evelyn Murgatroyd) or in possession of "a substantial private income" (Mrs Flushing) (18).

Moreover, what initially looks like the ship's complete isolation turns out to be an illusion, as the passage of "two sinister grey vessels, low in the water, and bald as bone [...] with the look of eyeless beasts seeking their prey" demonstrates (*VO* 72). Identified as the English Mediterranean Fleet, the warships are considered with deference by the *Euphrosyne*'s passengers starting with Clarissa's jingoistic exclamation "Aren't you glad to be English!" (*VO* 72). The parallel between Clarissa's enthusiasm at the sight of the two ships and her

[14] The scene anticipates the unsympathetic account of Leslie Stephen's fits of rage in *Moments of Being*, and the father-as-lion metaphor, discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

adoration of her husband as an agent of Empire underscores women's complicity in the structures of patriarchy, anticipating Terence's observation about "[t]he respect that women, even well-educated, very able women have for men," manifest in their tendency to see them "three times as big" (*VO* 239).[15] Over lunch, the ships inspire "talk of valour and death," prompting Clarissa and Willoughby to quote poetry and extol the value of "[l]ife on board a man of war" – deemed "splendid" – as well as the qualities of sailors as "quite nice and simple" people (*VO* 72). These attributes underscore the narrator's ironic dissociation from the characters, emphasising the latter's idealisation of what was a much darker reality. This reality is suggested by the vessels' "curious effect of discipline and sadness" and their sinister look, evocative of a less glorious side to the British Empire than "the magnificent qualities of British admirals" (*VO* 72). As such, they anticipate the description of the Elizabethan sailors on South American soil – "fangs greedy for flesh" (*VO* 96) – both suggestive of "the predatory nature of imperialism [...] and, from Rachel's point of view, male sexuality" (Peach, *Virginia Woolf* 53-4).

Helen Ambrose's is the only dissenting voice in the scene, echoing Woolf's own critical stance: "This being so, no one liked it when Helen remarked that it seemed to her as wrong to keep sailors as to keep a Zoo, and that as for dying on a battle-field, surely it was time we ceased to praise courage" (*VO* 72). This oblique critique of public notions of bravery is symptomatic of Bloomsbury's attitude and an early instance of Woolf's later overt condemnation of militarism. As Julia Briggs notes, the warships draw attention to the context of increased militarisation in which the novel was written, functioning "as a reminder of the arms race and the build-up of the fleet of Dreadnoughts" (*Virginia Woolf* 47). The passage also recalls an autobiographical episode in Virginia Stephen's life – the *Dreadnought* hoax –

[15] In a moment of largely uncritical insight, Clarissa assesses her feelings for Richard as "what my mother and women of her generation felt for Christ" (*VO* 53).

illustrative of the group's subversiveness towards the authority of the state and the Empire, embodied by the British navy. [16]

The hoax took place in 1910 while Woolf was working on *The Voyage Out*, and consisted in impersonating a number of Ethiopian princes on board the Dreadnought, "at that time the most powerful battleship in the world" (Stansky 17). More than a ship, the Dreadnought was "the very symbol of the British navy's assertion of its continuing superiority over the German navy" and the construction of eight more such battleships was an important election issue in January that year (Stansky 19). Helen's remark in *The Voyage Out* is illustrative of the spirit of irreverence behind the 1910 hoax. The latter did not result in any serious consequences for its perpetrators, but had the effect of "striking a blow [...], minor as it might be, for private values and against war" (Stansky 46).

In her 1940 talk to the Rodmell Women's Institute, Woolf limits herself to a light-hearted account of the episode.[17] Her brother Adrian Stephen's version, published by the Woolfs in 1936, is similar except for a more serious tone and some intimation of the spirit in which the group undertook their hoaxes, namely a "natural" opposition to authority.[18] As Stephen puts it, "It had seemed to me ever since I was very young […] that anyone who took up an attitude of authority over anyone else was necessarily also someone who offered a leg for everyone else to pull" (22). Evoking his idea for a hoax (disguising as German officers and taking German soldiers across the border to France) which did not materialise, Stephen voices an oblique anti-militarist critique: "I do not know […] that if everyone shared my feelings towards the great armed forces of the world, the world would not be a happier place

[16] The hoax, originated by Horace de Vere Cole, a friend of Adrian Stephen's from Cambridge but not a Bloomsbury member properly speaking, involved Adrian and Virginia Stephen, Duncan Grant, Anthony Buxton, Guy Ridley and Cole himself (Stansky 23). A detailed account of the outcome of the hoax features in Peter Stansky's *On or About December 1910: Early Bloomsbury and Its Intimate World*, 17-46.

[17] See Johnston, Georgia. "Virginia Woolf's Talk on the Dreadnought Hoax." *Woolf Studies Annual* 15 (2009): 1-45.

[18] At the beginning of the text, Stephen alludes to his sister as "so much better qualified" to tell the story, and to the "infinitely more amusing legend" that might result, but justifies his own authority as likely to produce a more accurate factual account (19-20).

to live in" (23). This, however, is qualified by the disclaimer: "I don't pretend I had a moral to preach, I only felt that armies and suchlike bodies presented legs that were almost irresistible" (23-4). A hoax which Adrian Stephen and Horace Cole carried out at Cambridge, staging an official visit to the Mayor by the uncle of the Sultan of Zanzibar and his suite, prepared them for the Dreadnought hoax. Nevertheless, the response to the two practical jokes was very different. As Woolf's brother admits: "A great many people – even those who had been thoroughly amused at the Cambridge joke – were profoundly shocked at the idea of hoaxing the Navy" (56-7). Stephen ends his account by praising the bravery of naval officers, but an underlying streak of irreverence persists: "Bravery is as much a matter of professional pride to them as is the quality of his potatoes to a greengrocer. I should be sorry […] to cast doubt on either" (60).

In the novel, the sight of the British warships and the Dalloways' presence on the *Euphrosyne* highlight the conjunction between home politics and Empire, propelling power relations onto centre stage, where they are both explicitly discussed and enacted by Clarissa and Richard. The couple embarks in Lisbon, a topographical detail which "introduces [...] the motifs of empire, global exploration and conquest" (Peach, *Virginia Woolf* 51).[19] The trip is supposed to serve the purpose of "broadening Mr Dalloway's mind," enabling him "to serve his country [...] out of Parliament" by meeting politicians, surveying the situation on the African coast and "look[ing] at certain guns," another allusion to militarisation (*VO* 37-38). Clarissa's thoughts on the ship reinforce the context of empire, linking the space of home – "the light burning over the House" – with the expansion of the British Empire and the remote territories which it had reached:

> Being on this ship seems to make it so much more vivid – what it really means to be English. One thinks of all we've done, and our navies, and the people in India

[19]For Linden Peach, Lisbon is equally suggestive of "the vulnerability of the great empires," alluding both to Portugal and its conquest by the Spanish, and to Britain and its defeat by the Spanish Armada (*Virginia Woolf* 51).

> and Africa, and how we've gone on century after century, sending out boys from little country villages […]. (*VO* 51)

Her husband's vision of British politics as "a lasso that opened and caught things, enormous chunks of the habitable globe" mirrors Clarissa's (*VO* 51). The image contrasts the earlier sense of disappearance of all geographical landmarks, associating cartographic representations with ideology and colonisation practices. Referring to such practices, Dalloway is of the opinion "that the English seem, on the whole, whiter than most men, their records cleaner" (*VO* 67). As Kathy J. Philips has pointed out, here the character voices "a widespread British view that Britain had a cleaner record in the colonies than other European powers," a view which Leonard Woolf's *Empire and Commerce in Africa* proved to be inaccurate (60). As shown later on, the novel alludes to the violence of imperial practices in the description of Santa Marina's history of colonisation.

In his earnest desire "to consolidate" the achievements of the British Empire and preserve the stability of the political establishment by denying women the right to vote, Richard represents the perfect embodiment of the close relation between imperialism and patriarchy, as well as its threat to women (*VO* 51). Woolf's understanding of this relation in the novel is not univocal: for instance, as discussed later on, Mrs Flushing is shown to be as much of an imperial predator as her husband. Similarly, the dissonant opinions on the question of suffrage voiced in the novel convey some of Woolf's own ambivalence, derived from a sense of the value of being an "outsider" later expressed in her polemical essays *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* (Wheare 15).

Nevertheless, in this episode, Richard's overpowering effect, which holds a certain lure to Rachel, derives as much from his masculine presence as from his strong views on Empire as a well-oiled machine. The sexual threat he poses to the young woman, materialised in his uninvited embrace, is bound up with his status as a member of the patriarchal machine

intent on conquest and mastery. Another illustration of the way in which the novel undercuts the voyage's promise for Rachel, this threat highlights the precariousness of the heroine's safety on board ship, raising the question of what constitutes a safe space for women. This question is intertwined with that of women's education, which the novel describes as unstructured and carried out in the home.

This thematic thread is one that runs throughout the novel, problematising the articulation between exterior space and the interior space of rooms, as well as the depiction of different sites, from the aunts' Richmond house to the heroine's cabin and later, the hotel and her room in the Ambroses' villa on Santa Marina. The cabin, whose "piano, and [...] mess of books on the floor" perfectly convey Rachel's tastes, is meant to provide a safe space "where she would sit for hours playing very difficult music, reading a little German or a little English when the mood took her" (*VO* 31). However, as Richard's assault shows, the cabin is neither a fortress nor a sanctuary, terms which later spring to Helen's mind to describe the importance of rooms – "more like worlds than rooms at the age of twenty-four" (*VO* 136).

Significantly, the description of the cabin is linked to the account of Rachel's upbringing and her lack of a solid education, resulting in a mind "in the state of an intelligent man's in the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth" (*VO* 31). Although the heroine's ignorance about modern realities and her own sexuality is couched in relatively benign terms, Helen's thoughts on chancing upon sleeping Rachel suggest a more troubling link between the young woman's mind and her vulnerability:

> In the first place she considered Rachel aesthetically; lying unprotected she looked somehow like a victim dropped from the claws of a bird of prey, but considered as a woman, a young woman of twenty-four, the sight gave rise to reflections. (*VO* 35)

Later in the novel, Helen raises the question of women's education explicitly, and expresses her criticism of "[t]he present method," deeming it "abominable" and considering it "not merely foolish but criminal to bring people up like that" (*VO* 104-5). The earlier scene is significant, foreshadowing the moment, a few pages later, when Rachel falls prey to Richard's sexual desire.

For the latter, Rachel's confessed ignorance is desirable – "It's far better that you should know nothing" – as a way of maintaining the status quo (*VO* 67). Unsurprisingly, he upholds the separation between the public and private spheres, according to which the man should be able to re-energise himself in the home and find comfort in the knowledge that his wife "has spent her day in calling, music, play with the children, domestic duties" (*VO* 68). His keeping his wife away from politics is presented as preservation from disillusionment, but this seemingly noble intention only recalls his explicit desire to deny the vote to women. Similarly, Rachel's ignorance of male sexual desire is deemed "[p]erhaps [...] wise" (*VO* 72). Nevertheless, it is precisely this ignorance that makes her vulnerable to his assault, suggesting that her sheltered upbringing constituted a trap rather than a means of protection.

Rachel's confused state of mind following Dalloway's forceful embrace yields this very realisation, articulated spatially through images of confinement. With the hindsight afforded by the emotional turmoil caused by Richard's kiss, "she saw her life for the first time a creeping hedged-in thing, driven cautiously between high walls, here turned aside, there plunged in darkness" (*VO* 87). The passage mirrors the scene of entrapment in the heroine's nightmare, later reworked into her illness and deathbed hallucinations:

> She dreamt that she was walking down a long tunnel, which grew so narrow by degrees that she could touch the damp bricks on either side. At length the tunnel opened and became a vault; she found herself trapped in it, bricks meeting her wherever she turned [...]. (*VO* 81)

Suzette Henke reads the tunnel image in psychoanalytical terms as "a physiological map of vagina and womb, harbouring in its uterine spaces a grotesque projection of the id" (104). Henke associates Rachel's "symptoms" with "the psychosexual etiology of female hysteria" (103) as described by Luce Irigaray and Elizabeth Grosz, viewing the protagonist as "the mystical hysteric whose body rejects incorporation into an imperialistic body politic through revolutionary gestures of sexual non-compliance" (107).[20] These images of a dark subterranean space in which Rachel's progress is effectively blocked provide a stark contrast with the expansive movement of the ship and the vastness of the South American landscape, reiterating the novel's oscillation between freedom and enclosure.

"Other Spaces"

The South American island of Santa Marina functions in a heterotopic manner as one of Michel Foucault's "counter-sites," a space which throws new light on the English community of tourists carrying out their cultural "rituals" against the backdrop of a place perceived as radically different ("Of Other Spaces" 24). The island's exoticism appears to be both inherent to the site itself as well as derived from the constant contrast between Santa Marina and the country / home left behind effected by the tourists' "orientalist" gaze. This corresponds to Hetherington's reading of the Foucauldian notion of heterotopia as a question of "difference in a relationship between sites" (43). The South American island constitutes a heterogeneous counter-site to the imperial metropolis, one whose difference is hard to contain and codify by the characters landing on Santa Marina, representatives of "the practice of imperial tourism" through their "identif[ication], for the most part, with Britain's imperial status" (E. Johnson 67).

[20] See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985) and Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (1989). Discussing Irigaray, Grosz explains hysteria as "the woman's rebellion against and rejection of the requirements of femininity" and "a refusal rather than a repression of heterosexuality," therefore "a mode of defiance of patriarchy," which provides one possible reading of Rachel's death in the novel (134-5).

The account of Santa Marina's colonisation history, with one imperial power replacing another in the course of three hundred years, extends the focus on imperial conquest initiated on the boat. As Mr Pepper muses after the *Euphrosyne* drops anchor "in the middle of a great bay," Santa Marina is a palimpsestic space over which successive powers claimed possession (*VO* 94). The colonisers are designated both in maritime and human terms as "Elizabethan barques", "Spanish galleons," "hardy Englishmen," "vengeful Spaniards and rapacious Portuguese," their passage resulting in the modification of the island's cartographic representation from red to green as well as its ethnic make-up, now "a happy compromise" (*VO* 96-7). The story which Mr Pepper is unable to share with his fellow travellers for want of an eager audience is one of violence, of English sailors swiftly defeating their Spanish enemies and "reduc[ing] the natives to a state of superstitious wonderment," only to "dwindle away" a few decades later in the face of new threats, both from inland and from the sea (*VO* 96).

Despite this long history of conquest, as the *Euphrosyne*'s passengers disembark, Santa Marina is described as a young English colony, the result of a more modern form of colonisation, powered by the attraction of the new and "a kind of dissatisfaction [...] with the older countries and the enormous accumulations of carved stone, stained glass, and rich brown painting which they offered to the tourist" (*VO* 97).[21] The enumeration makes use of recognisable markers of European culture to emphasise the contrast between the old continent and the exotic appeal of a foreign land. The Santa Marina settlement is said to be the outcome of an "infinitely small" movement led by "a handful of well-to-do people" enthralled by what they perceived as the newness of the land (*VO* 97).

The notion of newness used to explain the appeal of Santa Marina and the presence of the British on the island is problematic in its implicit disregard of the island's history. As

[21] The passage recalls the terms in which young Virginia expressed her own dissatisfaction with "so much ancient stone" in *A Passionate Apprentice* (193, cited earlier in this chapter).

such, it is reminiscent of what David Spurr has identified as the two functions of negation in colonial discourse, namely "to reject the ambiguous object for which language and experience provide no adequate framework of interpretation," and to perform "a kind of provisional erasure, clearing a space for the expansion of the colonial imagination and for the pursuit of desire" (92-3). These find illustration in the British colonists' reaction to the "new land," which the narrator conveys from the tourists' perspective, maintaining a certain degree of distance from the latter's orientalist gaze, signalled through the deliberate overemphasis on the notions of strangeness and wonder. Viewed through the lens of its European visitors, Santa Marina "taxed all their powers of description" while its inhabitants appeared "strangely beautiful, very big in stature, dark, passionate, and quick to seize the knife" (*VO* 97). Thus, "[t]he place seemed new and full of new forms of beauty," including typical items of dress and colonial artefacts, the object of predatory interest on the part of some of the tourists (*VO* 97). This is illustrated by the character of Mrs Flushing who, later on in the novel, boasts her collection of objects bought cheaply from unsuspecting locals to be sold "to smart women in London" (*VO* 272).

The two main locales on the island, the villa and the hotel, further reveal the characters' complex relationship with the newly discovered space of Santa Marina. Both provide the visitors with a home away from home, but these are precarious homes whose otherness seems obvious to the foreigners' eyes. The hotel, more capacious and more impersonal than the villa, is also more interesting in its staging of British social intercourse and its typological variety. The hotel is also deemed a more sanitary place than the villa by Mr William Pepper, who initially takes up residence with the Ambroses but leaves them for the hotel within days of arriving there. Although part of a comic scene, the detail evokes the dangers of contamination and disease, foreshadowing Rachel's illness.

The villa of which the Ambroses take possession upon arrival belongs to Ridley's brother-in-law. Significantly, it was "the least satisfactory of Helen Ambrose's brothers" who "had been sent out years before to make his fortune" in the colonies, a detail which obliquely questions the merits of the British subjects with whom responsibility for the colonial enterprise rested (*VO* 98). Seen through English lenses, the house appears as an exotic architectural form, "frail, ramshackle, and absurdly frivolous, more like a pagoda in a tea-garden than a place where one slept" (*VO* 99). Similarly, the garden contradicts ideas of a traditional English garden. The visitors' gaze is clearly evaluative, as the English servant's reaction to the place shows: "The indecency of the whole place struck Mrs Chailey forcibly" (*VO* 99). Mrs Chailey's disapproval of the sight extends to "the sallow Spanish servant-girl" who "hardly look[ed] like a human being" (*VO* 100). The assessment emphasises the distance between the two women, who otherwise occupy a similar position within their respective social system, placing Chailey above the local servant, in the same camp as her English employers.

The hotel is, like Santa Marina itself, a palimpsestic space, simultaneously old – a former monastery, as Mr Pepper informs his English friends – and new, converted into a "modern" space for the foreign visitors on the island. For Ayako Muneuchi, the hotel represents a "fluid, impersonal, and transient space" which epitomises modern experience and changing human relations (170).[22] Muneuchi sees its former function as a monastery as serving "to contrast traditional and modern societies," but its significance extends beyond an opposition between old and new (170). Spaces of spiritual and identity quests, monasteries constituted a radical – either freely embraced or imposed – alternative to marriage for women,

[22] Muneuchi posits the existence of a certain "affinity between the hotel and modernity" noting an increase in literary works in which the hotel features prominently at the beginning of the twentieth century, and even more so after World War I (169). Her examples include Henry James's *The Ambassadors* (1903), E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View* (1908), Elizabeth Bowen's and Leonard Woolf's homonymous novels *The Hotel* (1927 and 1939, respectively). One might also think of Jean Rhys' work, more particularly *Good Morning Midnight* (1939).

which can be linked with Louise DeSalvo's interpretation of Woolf's choice of name for Willoughby Vinrace's ship. Euphrosyne was one of the Greek graces but also a fifth-century saint also known as Santa Marina, who fled to a monastery to follow a higher calling and avoid an arranged marriage, where she lived dressed up as a man (DeSalvo 59-60). Like her, Rachel evades marriage through death, which would explain Woolf's changing the name of the resort from Santa Rosa to Santa Marina (DeSalvo 59-60).

The hotel, the site where the English visitors enact their cultural rituals, represents a source of fascination and disorientation for Rachel. Significantly, her first visit there in Helen Ambrose's company is an illicit one. Unbeknownst to the guests, the two women examine the hotel space from the outside, enjoying the sight afforded by the "uncurtained" and "brilliantly lighted" windows as a form of spectacle (*VO* 109). To them, it seems that "[e]ach window revealed a different section of the life of the hotel" (*VO* 109). This external view of the hotel (mediated, as it were, by Rachel and Helen's furtive gaze), is replaced by another form of description several pages later, when "[s]ome forty or fifty people were going to bed" (*VO* 113). Here, unmediated access to different rooms in the hotel provides a view from within. In this passage, the interest does not lie in the rooms themselves, which are, as the narrator points out, "as like in shape as one egg-box is like another" (*VO* 113-4). What makes a room different from the next is the human being contained in it. The suggestion that the hotel rooms stand for as many boxes or containers for the self becomes explicit later on in the novel when for Rachel, troubled by the growing feeling of love for Terence, "[t]hinking was no escape. Physical movement was the only refuge, *in and out of rooms, in and out of people's minds*, seeking she knew not what" (*VO* 301, emphasis added). In the earlier pages of the novel, this is precisely the course taken by the narrator: going from one room of the hotel to the next equates with visiting different characters' minds. Similarly, the reference to partitions "not as thick […] as one might wish" (*VO* 113) between the rooms of the hotel echoes the earlier

image of the shared dream on board the *Euphrosyne* and reinforces the association between spatial containers and the self: "The dreams […] went from one brain to another. They all dreamt of each other that night, as was natural, considering how thin the partitions were between them […]" (53).

A "container" for the English travellers – housing their cultural rituals as well as their psychic interiority and material possessions – the hotel constitutes a safe space from which to apprehend the land's otherness. Away from the hotel, the English find themselves exposed and vulnerable, despite their initial excitement. The trip up the Amazon, meant to be the culmination of the travellers' exploration of the "new land," ends in a double impasse – both personally for Rachel (since the jungle is where she contracts her fatal disease as well as getting engaged to Terence) and collectively, as an "ethnographic" experience.[23] The encounter in the jungle proves an unsettling experience for the English, with the natives sustaining and returning their gaze, turning the English themselves into an object of observation:

> The women took no notice of the strangers, except that their hands paused for a moment and their long narrow eyes slid round and fixed upon them with the motionless inexpressive gaze of those removed from each other far far beyond the plunge of speech. Their hands moved again, but the stare continued. (*VO* 331-2)

As Carey J. Snyder points out, here Woolf is "[r]eversing the conventional dynamic of a colonial encounter," whose effect consists in "defamiliarizing English culture and turning English characters into 'natives'" (98).

[23] Carey J. Snyder uses the term "impasse" in her reading of the scene to describe the impossibility of communication between the natives and the English: "Despite intense scrutiny on both sides, these would-be ethnographers seem to arrive at an impasse: separated by a vast linguistic gulf, neither group can understand the other" (98).

The travellers' vulnerability in the jungle episode is confirmed by Rachel's illness in the final chapters of the novel, when, confined to her room, the young woman finds herself "completely cut off, unable to communicate with the rest of the world, isolated with her own body" (*VO* 384). Not only does the heroine's perception of the room function as a barometer for her condition, but the room itself comes to stand metonymically for Rachel's body, thematising the tension between body and soul, the inner and the outer. In the early days of her illness, "the wall of her room was painfully white, and curved slightly, instead of being straight and flat" (*VO* 382). Later on, distortions in Rachel's perception of her surroundings take more extreme forms. Submitted to the abnormal filter of Rachel's gaze, relations of distance and closeness, as well as depth, height and size, undergo mutation to the effect that "[t]he room […] had the odd power of expanding" and "[s]ometimes she could see through the wall in front of her" by virtue of everything growing "very pale and semi-transparent" (*VO* 404). The tension between body and mind, expressed in an earlier episode of the novel in terms of Rachel's sense of dissolution and estrangement from her own body, is here vividly played out against the backdrop of the room to which she is confined:

> But for long spaces of time she would merely lie conscious of her body floating on the top of the bed and her mind driven to some remote corner of her body, or escaped and gone flitting round the room. All sights were something of an effort, but the sight of Terence was the greatest effort, because he forced her to join mind to body in the desire to remember something. (*VO* 404-5)

After Rachel's death, Mrs Thornbury's thought (at the sight of the Ambroses' villa) of "how the soul of the dead had passed from those windows" suggests a metonymical relation between the empty room and Rachel's dead body, anticipating Jacob's room (*VO* 416).

In these final scenes, the sickroom recalls Rachel's earlier visions of entrapment, which, as suggested at the beginning of the chapter, participate in the novel's narrative of

blocked progress. Somewhat paradoxically, the emphasis on routes problematises the voyage's promise of freedom, foregrounding the human, material and ideological circulation between the different spaces in the novel. These spaces, from the aunts' Richmond rooms to the small enclaves of Englishness on the South American island and beyond, map onto constrained options for women, emphasising the novel's writing of travel as mobile containment.

Chapter 4

Night and Day: Great Men's Rooms and Women's Lives

On 30 January 1905, less than a year after her father's death and not long after the Stephen siblings' move to 46 Gordon Square, young Virginia went back to visit her former home in Hyde Park Gate. Her emotional experience on contemplating the empty space of childhood is recorded in her diary:

> I went over Hyde Park Gate – for the first time since last Easter – & saw all the empty rooms, & was glad to find that now the furniture & books are gone; they are not painfully like home. Saw my old room – so strange with the ink splashes & shelves as of old. I could write the history of every mark & scratch in that room, where I lived so long. (*PA* 230)

The empty rooms, although vacated of people and furniture, retain traces of their existence, allowing a sort of archaeological reconstruction, a rereading of the past through the examination of surviving signs. When, in the early 1920s, Woolf thought of the work it took Vanessa to extract the family and furniture from Hyde Park Gate, she pictured it as a form of violence, almost as if the house and its occupants had to be literally torn apart: "Sometimes I believe she had actually to get men with hammers to batter down – so wedged into each other had the walls and the cabinets become" (*MB* 184).

The empty rooms in the 1905 diary entry evoke a kind of disused family museum, suggesting the present's victory over the past and a clear spatial break with the Victorian heritage embodied by Hyde Park Gate. Nevertheless, the tone is not one of triumph but one tinged with nostalgia. However dark, the spatial story contained within the bare walls of Hyde Park Gate was an essential chapter of the family history, expressive of a legacy which Woolf would negotiate again and again in her writing.

As Hermione Lee has documented, the visit to the empty house in Hyde Park Gate coincided with the writing of "an anonymous contribution [...] to Frederic Maitland's *Life* of Leslie Stephen" (*Virginia Woolf* 19). The request came at an opportune time as she was recovering from the breakdown following her father's death in 1904. Initially, the help she was asked to provide consisted in reading and transcribing letters between her parents, deemed "so private that Fred wont [sic] look at them himself" (*L*1: 148). Despite her application, the work proved tedious as well as the source of conflict over what was to be included in the *Life*. Jack Hills, in particular, challenged young Virginia's authority, despite her own sense of the need "for delicacy and reserve where my own Father and Mother are concerned," arousing her exasperation "with his thickskulled [sic] proprieties" (*L*1: 151). Vanessa herself claimed she preferred to destroy rather than make public "the more intimate bits" (Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 205). As Lee notes, this "was Virginia Stephen's first brush with the censorious conventions of biography and with the question of who owned a person's posthumous life" (*Virginia Woolf* 205).

On Maitland's request, alongside sorting her parents' letters, Virginia also wrote her own contribution to her father's *Life.*[1] She mentions starting work on it on 9 January 1905 and finding it "[s]o far smooth, & delightful writing" (*PA* 219). The following day, she anticipates that "I shall finish sooner than I thought, as I know what I want to say, & have not much difficulty in saying it" (*PA* 219). In Lee's words, the Note "places her in a traditional handmaid's role: the young woman writer dedicating herself to the life of the famous father" (*Virginia Woolf* 19). Unsurprisingly, Maitland found the daughter's homage "beautiful […] just what your Father would have wished you to write" (*L*1: 180).

[1] The postscript to her letter to Violet Dickinson dated 8 December 1904 reads: "I saw Fred M[aitland] this afternoon [..]. He wants me to write something of what I remember, for him – so that will give me something to do after Xmas. I want to do it as well as I can" (*L*1: 165).

Years later, Woolf's position on the question of filiation is expressed in different terms. The well-known diary entry on what would have been her father's 96th birthday in 1928 after the publication of *To the Lighthouse*, which she saw as laying to rest her parents' ghosts, provides an unequivocal answer: "[n]o writing, no books; – inconceivable" (*D*3: 208). The passage indicates that the father's death had been a necessary loss just as the mother's legacy of the "angel in the house" had had to be discarded for a newly free, creative self to emerge. The 1939 memoir speaks openly of the "tyrannies" of Hyde Park Gate. By 1939, however, Woolf's standpoint is dramatically different – closer in age to her father, she is driven both by a need for honesty as well as by the desire to make sense of the past.

The theme of filiation is one to which Woolf was drawn early on in her writing career, and which finds different figurative expressions. As discussed in chapter 6, in *The Years*, the possibility that the late Victorian legacy embodied by the Pargiter household might endure physically undiminished by the passage of time is envisaged as a threat to the younger generation. Thus, the mother's portrait as a young girl presiding over the mantelpiece forms a queer juxtaposition with the prolonged agony of the dying mother. The latter's end, however sad, brings about the disintegration of the household and, with it, the younger Pargiters' liberation from what, in retrospect, Martin Pargiter deems an "abominable system" (*TY* 163).

It is, however, the 1919 novel *Night and Day* which first explicitly explores this theme, placing at its centre the story of a generational divide, and the fiction of a Victorian home turned monument to the dead.[2] The house in Cheyne Walk, although home to the Hilbery family – the great poet Richard Alardyce's descendants – becomes, in effect, a museum, an unofficial site of literary heritage devoted to the memory of the poet's life. The idea of "ancestor worship" – a phrase which resonates with the Victorian imperative of the worship of greatness formulated by Thomas Carlyle – is doubly thematised in the novel: the

[2] The novel's working title in 1915, *The Third Generation*, also illustrates this concern.

house is not only the site of the poet's "shrine" but also the place where his biography is being written. Thus, house and biography outline a common space of memorialization, underpinned by the same relationship of reverence towards the past and subject to similar constraints. The protagonist's difficult negotiation of these constraints shows how memorialization practices "converged to sustain not only the memory of the enshrined writer, but also ideologies of empire, gender and class" (Zemgulys 146).

Katharine's search for new answers – "her experiment in living when the great age was dead" (*ND* 29) – gestures towards Woolf's own renegotiation of familial and literary legacies, "deeply linked as sources of both nostalgia and claustrophobia" (Briggs, *Virginia Woolf* 50). Ultimately, the novel does not mark a break with the past as much as an attempt at reconfiguring the protagonist's relationship with the legacy embodied by the house in Cheyne Walk and the great poet's biography. The juxtaposition highlights the novel's interweaving of material, textual and metaphorical space and invites a conjoint reading of these meanings in its writing of rooms.

Cheyne Walk and "the Ceremony of Ancestor-Worship"

Writing about Leonard's response to the completed novel in her diary on 27 March 1919, Woolf explains what he had judged its "very melancholy" philosophy thus:

> I don't admit to being hopeless though – only the spectacle is a profoundly strange one; & as the current answers don't do, one has to grope for a new one; & the process of discarding the old, when one is by no means certain what to put in their place, is a sad one. (*D*2: 259)

The passage is significant on several levels. On one level, the quest for new answers is the writer's quest. Woolf continues by wondering whether Bennett's or Thackeray's answers are "satisfactory solutions," so the relationship between old and new evoked here sets up a

contrast between earlier literature and her new creation, in regard to which she feels she "compare[s] for originality & sincerity rather well with most of the moderns" (*D*2: 259). As Julia Briggs notes, the sense of dissatisfaction with "the current answers" voiced in the diary soon prompted Woolf to produce a piece on "Modern Novels" for the *Times Literary Supplement* later known as "Modern Fiction," which "became a manifesto for modernism as well as a programme for her own future as a writer" (*Virginia Woolf* 51). Thus, despite its apparent allegiance to earlier writing conventions, *Night and Day* took Woolf one step closer to "working free," as she felt after the completion of *Jacob's Room* (*D*2: 208).

On another level, the "profoundly strange" spectacle and "the current answers" can be read as an allusion to the crisis brought on by the War, the "sense of inner and outer worlds being pulled violently apart" which *Night and Day* conveys (Briggs, "Introduction" xi).[3] The image used to describe the "sad" process of "discarding the old" – "groping" for new answers – lacks confidence and optimism, and that is precisely the tone of her second novel. In *Night and Day*, the search for new answers – with its adjacent questioning of traditional thinking on issues such as gender relations and marriage – represents a major concern for the main characters. In fact, the 27 March 1919 diary entry finds its almost literal transcription in the novel, in a scene where Katharine confronts her dilemma about Ralph Denham and William Rodney:

> Like all people brought up in a tradition, Katharine was able […] to reduce any moral difficulty to its traditional shape and solve it by the traditional answers. The book of wisdom lay open, if not upon her mother's knee, upon the knees of many uncles and aunts. She had only to consult them, […] but in her case the questions became phantoms directly she tried seriously to find an answer, which proved that the traditional answer would be of no use to her individually. […]

[3] Julia Briggs sees this as evidence that, although set before the War, "the novel was none the less shaped by it and by the sense of crisis that it induced," which contradicts the terms in which Katherine Mansfield formulated her criticism of the novel at the time ("Introduction" xii).

> The only truth which she could discover was the truth of what she herself felt – a frail beam […]; but having rejected the visionary voices, she had no choice but to make this her guide through the dark masses which confronted her. (*ND* 265)

The scene shows Katharine walking towards Cromwell Road on an errand entrusted to her by her mother, and her thoughts coincide with the sight of "the row of houses on either side of her," whose curtained windows "must […] keep the room inside very dark" (*ND* 265).[4] Built space functions as the spatial manifestation of the tradition whose answers no longer satisfy Katharine: the dark rooms, suggestive of secrecy and censorship, enhance the heroine's sense of "groping" for answers. The space of the city affords Katharine freedom of movement, the somatic translation of her meandering thoughts, but her progress is that of someone entranced, "reprehensively and almost ridiculously detached from the surrounding scene" (*ND* 265). The pursuit of "a true feeling among the chaos of the unfeelings or half-feelings of life" (an early figuration of Woolf's "moment of being") is the tentative search for a kind of knowledge gleaned from sources other than the older generation's readily available "book of wisdom" (*ND* 265).

The notion of filiation and the contrast between old and new – the Victorian and the modern – are central thematic concerns in *Night and Day*. For Steve Ellis, this is not surprising since the writing of the novel corresponds to Woolf's emerging thinking of "the Victorian as a cultural and historical entity," which he dates around 1916 (13). Ellis sees Lytton Strachey's iconoclastic biographical writings published as *Eminent Victorians* in 1918 as "[t]he major stimulus" for this (13).[5] The War, too, provided a context of "retrospective evaluation […] as if the Victorian ceased definitively with this event rather than with the Queen's death in 1901" (Ellis 14). Nevertheless, Ellis questions readings which conflate

[4] The errand consists in taking flowers to "the widow of a general living in the Cromwell Road," who springs to Mrs Hilbery's mind as a substitute for "the actually destitute and starving, whom she would much have preferred," an ironic allusion to upper-middle class women's involvement in philanthropic work, as detailed in chapter 6 (*ND* 264).

[5] Woolf had read these writings well ahead of their publication, in 1915-1916 (Ellis 14).

Woolf's attitude towards the Victorian with that of Strachey, noting that "Woolf and Strachey had had in fact a long history of differing about the Victorians" (15). In his view, *Night and Day* is indebted less to Strachey's book and "a good deal more to a work memorialising the Victorians" (16), namely Henry James's *The Middle Years*, which is in line with his overall reading of the novel as "eager to find ways of mediating between past and present" (24).[6] In this light, the book represents "a spectacular act of compensation" which "shows how far Woolf is willing to rewrite the past in the interests of a Jamesian 'act of piety'" (Ellis 23).

Invoking what, in "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf labels the "unhappy years" at 22 Hyde Park Gate, and her reworking of that environment into the Hilbery household in *Night and Day*, Ellis views the house in Cheyne Walk as "precisely not Hyde Park Gate in location, design or habitation" (33).[7] To this effect, he emphasises the benign aspect of the Hilbery home, conveyed through "images of soft lighting, spaciousness […] and welcoming comfort" (33). This Bachelardian reading of interior space tends to minimise the heroine's sense of dissatisfaction with the domestic environment to which her gender and class constrain her, at times felt with claustrophobic intensity. As shown later in the chapter, this sense of claustrophobia underlies the contrast between Katharine's and Mary's living spaces, opposing the solid Victorian house and the tradition it stands for to an alternative model of women living in the city.

In the same vein, Ellis reads Katharine's assertion about hating the moderns – "You said you liked modern things. I said I hated them" (*ND* 119) – as evidence of her "traditional views" (28).[8] However, the novel complicates the question of Katharine's allegiance, presenting her as torn between the values of her parents' generation and her sense that these

[6] Woolf wrote a praising review of the book in October 1917, entitled "The Old Order" (Ellis 16).
[7] Woolf refers to the period between Stella's death in 1897 and her father's death in 1904 as "the seven unhappy years" (MB 136).
[8] See Ellis's discussion of Katharine and Ralph on pages 28-9 of *Virginia Woolf and the Victorians*. Katharine's assertion in the passage is immediately qualified by Ralph's perspective: "This was not a very accurate report of their conversation among the relics, perhaps, but Ralph was flattered to think that she remembered anything about it" (*ND* 119).

values had lost their relevance for the modern world.[9] Moreover, the practice of ancestor worship within the Hilbery home hinders Katharine's full understanding of her own individuality, with views distinct from those of past generations. Thus, if the young woman feels compelled to defend her family's legacy from Ralph's attack in the first chapter of the novel, her opposition may be read more as a matter of principle than the expression of deeply-held beliefs. In the same way, despite his apparent antagonism, Ralph is aware that "her position at the tea-table, among all these elderly people, was not without its difficulties" (*ND* 6).

The book's opening on a tea-table scene in the Hilbery drawing-room in Cheyne Walk foregrounds Katharine's difficulty and underscores the novel's use of spatial representations to articulate its critique of domesticity. By devoting the first pages to a scene in which the protagonist is busy serving tea "in common with many young ladies of her class" (*ND* 3), Woolf makes clear the novel's concern with "the tension within women's lives between public and private roles" (Snaith, *Virginia Woolf* 31). If *The Voyage Out* takes its heroine away from England and her domestic life in Richmond, offering only brief retrospective glimpses into Rachel's secluded existence in her aunts' company, *Night and Day* brings the domestic sphere into focus, fulfilling Terence Hewet's wish for insights into women's "curious silent unrepresented life" (*VO* 245). Ralph Denham echoes Terence Hewet, displaying a similar interest in "the glimpse which half-drawn curtains offered him of kitchens, dining-rooms, and drawing-rooms, illustrating with mute power different scenes from different lives" (*ND* 15).

The Hilbery home, illustrative of "the insularity of the Victorian family" in its aural separation from the modern world outside, provides the perfect setting for the exploration of

[9] A concrete example of this is Katharine's assessment of her cousin Cyril's "misbehaviour" and her understanding of the difference between her parents' and her own attitude towards it: "As usual, she saw something which her father and mother did not see […]. They would think whether it was good or bad; to her it was merely a thing that had happened" (*ND* 91).

women's roles (Snaith, "*The Years*, Street Music and Acoustic Space" 4). For Ralph Denham, entering the family drawing-room feels "as if a thousand softly padded doors had closed between him and the street outside" (*ND* 4). Despite the lively conversation, the drawing-room has an antiquated feel to it, reinforced by the "fine mist" and the "mellowed" wax-like faces of the guests (*ND* 4). The image instantly communicates a sense of seclusion, recreating an interior cut off from the buzz of the city, a late-Victorian world keeping modernity at bay. As later chapters show, similar images of muffled rooms are used in *The Years* and in Woolf's autobiographical writings, where the narrative of "the loosening of the Victorian, patriarchal, bourgeois family structure and its spatial configurations" is attuned to "alterations in sonic production and reception" (Snaith, "*The Years*, Street Music and Acoustic Space" 4). The solid walls of the Hilbery home filter the noise of the city, modifying Denham's perception so that, in the smaller room holding the relics of Richard Alardyce's life – "something like a chapel in a cathedral, or a grotto in a cave" – the distant sound of the London traffic is reduced to a mere "soft surge of waters" (*ND* 8).

The simile highlights the house's function in the novel as a space of memorialisation, inhabited by the dead as much as by the living, an image later conjured up by Katharine in relation to extracts from her mother's biography, "so lightning-like in their illumination, that the dead seemed to crowd the very room" (*ND* 30). The imagery used suggests that the house is a museum as well as a crypt.[10] Thus, Richard Alardyce's shrine thematises the idea of built space as archive: in the literal sense, as a site where the relics of the great poet are housed, but also figuratively, as a space which embodies and perpetuates certain ideas of value and gender ideologies. The novel juxtaposes it to the other space of memorialisation, Alardyce's biography, thus conflating material and textual space as a means of critique.

[10] Linden Peach sees the term *crypta* – in its "literal meaning of 'vault' and the metaphorical meaning of 'secret'" – as particularly adapted to the household's worship of the literary past and the "family's close association with British imperial history," obliquely alluded to in the novel (*Virginia Woolf* 58).

The centrality of the great poet's shrine within the household and the intellectual and domestic tradition embodied in it do much to complicate Steve Ellis's reading of the house "as benign in many ways" (23). Katharine's recurrent feelings of claustrophobia and resentment for the demands made upon her time and sympathy produce a very ambivalent picture of life at home. Her domestic duties as well as the memorialization work in which she is involved – serving as a guide to the poet's relics and helping with her mother's biography of her grandfather – leave little time for pursuits of her own, such as her passion for mathematics, kept a secret and indulged in rare moments of freedom. Thus, in Julia Brigg's words, the house "signifies the beauty, order and imprisonment of the Victorian literary tradition" ("Introduction" xxii).

The function of the Hilbery home as a site of literary heritage is signalled not only by its "teem[ing] with signs of literary life" but also by its geographical location (Zemgulys 178). Cheyne Walk in Chelsea bears strong literary associations with names such as Thomas Carlyle, Elizabeth Gaskell, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, George Eliot or Henry James, who appears in the novel in the guise of Mr Fortescue. Carlyle, who "dominated the world of letters and British literary heritage in the late Victorian period," had particular significance for Woolf and her family (Zemgulys 145). Leslie Stephen, "one of Carlyle's admirers and intellectual heirs," had supported and helped establish his house-museum in Cheyne Row (Zemgulys 145).[11]

Young Virginia read Carlyle's life and work avidly, as the early diaries indicate. In 1897, in less than three weeks, she devoured the two volumes of James Anthony Froude's *Life and Times of Thomas Carlyle* and two volumes of "the Carlyles [sic] Life in London," commenting on "the first part of his life before he settled in London": "[m]ost extraordinary phenomenon" (*PA* 13). Carlyle remains a recurrent presence in Woolf's diaries and letters as

[11] According to Zemgulys, Woolf visited Carlyle's house four times, in 1897, 1898, 1909, and 1931, "twice accompanying her father in the earlier years" (150).

well as her fictional and non-fictional work, from *Flush*, *Orlando* or A *Room of One's Own* to a variety of essays including "The Art of Biography," "Ruskin," "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" or "Great Men's Houses." In Andrea Zemgulys's view, Woolf "returned to Carlyle heritage in her writing […] because of her father Leslie Stephen's advocacy, because of its extreme enactment of 'worship' and rhetoric of 'great men,' and because of its documenting of Victorian household life" (150).

Her 1932 essay "Great Men's Houses," which details Woolf's visit to Carlyle's house in Cheyne Row and John Keats's house in Hampstead, confirms this conjunction of interests in the figure of the famous man of letters.[12] The essay starts with an ironic comment on the spread of sites of literary heritage across the city: "London, happily, is becoming full of great men's houses" (*LS* 37). Memorialisation practices are satirised in a move which replaces great men's "artistic taste" – a "natural" criterion of value – with "a much rarer and more interesting gift – a faculty for housing themselves appropriately, for making the table, the chair, the curtain, the carpet into their own image" (*LS* 38). The symbiosis between great men and their lived space described here implies that status is bound up with, and supported by, the domestic space of memorialisation, despite the less harmonious reality that the latter may reveal, as illustrated by Carlyle's house. This reality becomes immediately apparent to the visitor's observant eye: "in two seconds, one is made acquainted with a fact that escaped the attention of Froude, and yet was of incalculable importance – they had no water laid on" (*LS* 38).

"Reading" the house-museum yields insights missing from the great man's biography – both "texts" of memorialisation, the two provide different insights into the writer's life. This is first in a series of observations on the domestic set-up of the Carlyles' home, leading to the conclusion that "number 5 Cheyne Row is not so much a dwelling-place as a battlefield – the

[12] Published alongside "The Docks of London," "Oxford Street Tide," Abbeys and Cathedrals," "'This is the House of Commons,'" and "Portrait of a Londoner" in *Good Housekeeping* from December 1931 to December 1932.

scene of labour, effort and perpetual struggle" (*LS* 40). The idea is supported by reconstructed scenes of labour which unite "mistress and maid" across the class divide, in a common effort of "pumping and [...] scrubbing" (*LS* 39). In opposition to these, Woolf places the image of the writer in the attic,

> groan[ing], as he wrestled with his history, [...] while a yellow shaft of London light fell upon his papers and the rattle of a barrel organ and the raucous shouts of street hawkers came through walls whose double thickness distorted but by no means excluded the sound. (*LS* 39)

The passage alludes to the Victorian construction of great men as isolated geniuses, explicitly formulated in the essay "Ruskin," where Carlyle features as an example: "[our fathers] liked their great men to be isolated from the rest of the world. Genius was nearly as antisocial and demanded almost as drastic a separation from the ordinary works and duties of mankind as insanity" (*CE*1: 205). The image of the groaning writer in the attic also evokes a biographical detail of Carlyle's life, namely his soundproof room at 5 Cheyne Row. The latter, "complete with muffling air chambers, and double thickness walls," represented an attempt to isolate himself from the increasingly noisy urban environment, "seen as an unacceptable intrusion on the sanctity of the middle and upper-middle class Victorian home" (Snaith, "*The Years*, Street Music and Acoustic Space" 7). Woolf jokingly refers to it in her 1928 mock biography, linking it to the protagonist's ironic conclusion "that genius since it needed all this coddling must be growing very delicate" (*O* 278).[13]

In "Great Men's Houses," the image of Carlyle's isolation underscores the imbalance of gender roles within the household, strengthening Woolf's critique. Instead of reading the house-museum through the memory of its most illustrious occupant, the essay focuses on the

[13] A much earlier reference features in the essay "Haworth" (1904) where, deliberating "whether pilgrimages to the shrines of famous men ought not to be condemned as sentimental journeys," she writes: "It is better to read Carlyle in your own study chair than to visit the sound-proof room and pore over the manuscripts at Chelsea" (*E*1: 5).

work that the women in the household carried out in the service of the "great man." Thus, as Susan M. Squier writes, Woolf "subverted the demands of the standard journalistic house tour, making it instead an ironic challenge to the values implicit in Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* and an exposé of woman's exploitation, whatever her class, by those heroic 'great men'" ("The London Scene" 489).

In *Night and Day*, Woolf makes Ralph Denham on his first visit to the house in Cheyne Walk the outspoken critic of greatness. Replying to Katharine's remark on the mediocrity of the present, the young man retorts: "'No, we haven't any great men, […] I'm very glad that we haven't. I hate great men. The worship of greatness in the nineteenth century seems to me to explain the worthlessness of that generation'" (*ND* 12). This critique is an undercurrent that runs throughout the novel, countering the view of the past as "heroic" and peopled by beings of "unexampled size" (*ND* 33). In the opening scene, Ralph's comment indirectly targets Katharine's family, later presented as a breeding ground for greatness, boasting "conspicuous judges and admirals, lawyers and servants of the State […] before the richness of the soil culminated in the rarest flower that any family can boast, a great writer, a poet eminent among the poets of England" (*ND* 26). The narrator's ironic comment on the question of merit echoes Ralph's earlier criticism – "It's all been done for you" (*ND* 12), deflating the preceding panegyric of familial worth: "English society being what it is, no very great merit is required, once you bear a well-known name, to put you into a position where it is easier […] to be eminent than obscure" (26).

The implications of the notion of merit tie in with Woolf's discussion of "ancestor worship" in the novel. For Katharine and her mother, the great poet's direct descendant, the means of earning their "right to their privileged position" consists in their duty of memorialization: first, by attending to the house as a site of literary pilgrimage and second, by writing the great man's biography (*ND* 30). Otherwise, in Katharine's view, "[t]heir

increment became yearly more and more unearned" (*ND* 30). Michael Whitworth reads this as "a submerged and wonderfully condensed metaphor," linking it to Katharine's status as "a property owner, passively benefiting from the work of others" (*Locating Woolf* 16). The two women are thus cast in the role of handmaidens, despite talents of their own: Katharine's mathematical abilities and Mrs Hilbery's literary inclinations as well as her ability to write, illustrated by the fact that she "covered a page every morning as instinctively as a thrush sings" (*ND* 29). Their roles within the household bring to the fore the gender politics underlying memorialization. By centring on the home as the site where "the writer was best revered" – "the very source of personal, familial and national virtue" – memorialization took over "what was properly speaking women's sphere" (Zemgulys 25-6). It also reconciled tensions between the public and the domestic figure of the great man, as in Carlyle's case, whose far from perfect domestic life did not affect the success of his house-museum, despite some controversy (Zemgulys 150).[14]

By viewing the house as the scene of female labour in "Great Men's Houses," Woolf de-constructs that reading of great men, unpacking the tensions which memorialization sought to paper over. *Night and Day* sets up a similar critique by underscoring Katharine's confinement within roles which intensify her sense of disconnection between her public and private selves. The narrator sums up her position as

> […] a member of a very great profession which has, as yet, no title and very little recognition, although the labour of mill and factory is, perhaps, no more severe and the results of less benefit to the world. She lived at home. She did it very well, too. Any one coming to the house in Cheyne Walk felt that here was an orderly place, shapely, controlled – a place where life had been trained to show to the best advantage […]. (*ND* 33)

[14] The great man's "troubled domestic life" had become public knowledge after the publication of J. A. Froude's biography of Carlyle, Carlyle's own *Reminiscences* of his wife and Jane Welsh's *Letters* (Zemgulys 149).

This contradicts Mary Datchet's later criticism that "[s]he doesn't understand about work. She's never had to. She doesn't know what work is" (*ND* 332). On the contrary, domestic space constitutes the stage on which Katharine's "professionalism" in performing domestic tasks, the result of long years of training, is repeatedly put to the test. In her parents' drawing-room, the young woman makes use of her tea-table skills with a composure indicating that "she was evidently mistress of a situation which was familiar enough to her" and which occurred "for the six hundredth time, perhaps" (*ND* 3).[15] In the smaller room, where she leads Ralph following her mother's suggestion that he should be shown "our things," she displays the proficiency of a trained guide (*ND* 7). This is manifest in the way she manipulates the different objects so as to create the greatest impact on the visitor, and alternates speech and silence "as if these spaces had all been calculated" (*ND* 9).

In line with literary geography practices, the Hilbery family strive to offer visitors to Richard Alardyce's shrine an experience of what Zemgulys calls "the person in the place" (45), in other words "the *sense* of an author as embodied person" (47). The "little room […] crowded with relics" houses not only objects memorialising the great man, like the portrait whose "eyes looked […] out of the mellow pinks and yellows of the paint with divine friendliness," but also everyday objects such as his glasses or his slippers (*ND* 8). These remnants of the poet's domestic life are treated with absent-minded reverence, as they arouse Katharine's musing on the gigantic dimensions of the past compared to the present. In a later scene, her attitude is more critical. Although she assumes her "duties as a show-woman" with professional readiness, her patience is put to the test by the American visitor's "foolish […] enthusiasms" (*ND* 269-70). Here, the relics of the poet's everyday existence are considered

[15] The tea-serving scenes in the novel echo Woolf's evocation of her own "tea-table training" in *Moments of Being*: "I see myself, not reviewing a book, but handing plates of buns to shy young men and asking them: do they take cream and sugar" (150). Later in the novel, Katharine is shown to absent-mindedly take over the tea-serving ritual in Mary's rooms while "Mary found herself making conversation with William about old Italian pictures" (*ND* 144).

with irony, as illustrated by Mrs Bankes's ecstasy in front of Richard Alardyce's slippers, which cut short her inspection of a manuscript: "she hastily grasped the old shoes, and remained for a moment dumb in contemplation of them" (*ND* 269).

The implied irony in this passage is indicative of Woolf's ambivalence about literary geography, expressed as early as 1905, as discussed in the introduction to this study. In a piece written before "Literary Geography" and published in the Manchester *Guardian* in December 1904, Woolf gives an account of her visit to the Brontë sisters' parsonage at Haworth which "promotes a correct, even scientific approach to the places of the literary past" (Zemgulys 153). This, however, coexists with a certain amount of excitement and emotion, as the feelings experienced in front of the surviving relics of Charlotte Brontë's life indicate:

> But the most touching case […] is that which contains the little personal relics, the dresses and shoes of the dead woman. The natural fate of such things is to die before the body that wore them, and because these, trifling and transient though they are, have survived, Charlotte Brontë the woman comes to life, and one forgets the chiefly memorable fact that she was a great writer. (*E*1: 7)

The passage acknowledges the emotional impact of personal memorabilia, evocative of the dead writer's humanity. In *Night and Day*, too, the realisation of the great poet's humanity – as someone "young, unhappy, tempestuous, full of desires and faults" – is what makes it possible for Katharine to commune with her grandfather through a different channel from the earlier unquestioning reverence (*ND* 271).

Writing Great Men's Lives

The transformation in Katharine's understanding of her grandfather as a flawed human being rather than as an august Victorian literary figure implies a shift in her relationship with the subject of her mother's biography. This is not explicitly stated in the novel, but the fact

that the biography remains unwritten may be read as a sign of success rather than failure. The incompletion of Mrs Hilbery's book suggests the possibility of a turn from the reverential, monolithic memorialization embodied in the relics room to one ready to accommodate "contradictory versions of the same face," resulting in "a richer unity," as Woolf describes modern biography (*CE*4: 226).

In *Night and Day*, the difficulty of biography writing stems partly from the family's values and attitude towards the past, which are central to the novel's discussion of the politics of literary tradition and memorialization, as well as the underlying principle of greatness. These are questions that Woolf addresses repeatedly in her writings on biography. Theorising the emergence of modern biographical practices in the 1939 essay "The Art of Biography," Woolf asks: "what is greatness? And what smallness?" (*CE*4: 227). This interrogation points to a radical move in life writing from nineteenth-century conventions to what elsewhere she terms "the new biography." Not only does she postulate a different relationship to one's subject of investigation but also the idea that the criteria motivating biographical practice should, and have changed. This amounts to undermining the notion of worth or greatness as a condition for biography: "Is not anyone who has lived a life, and left a record of that life, worthy of biography – the failures as well as the successes, the humble as well as the illustrious?" (*CE*4: 226-7).

A variation on this question can be found in *Jacob's Room*, where the eponymous hero is writing an essay entitled: "Does History Consist of the Biographies of Great Men?" The title alludes to Carlyle's famous assertion that "The History of the world is but the Biography of great men," formulated in his 1840 series of lectures on hero worship and the heroic (26). At the beginning of Lecture I, the latter introduces his "large topic" with a view of history as "at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, […] the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators of whatsoever the general mass

of men contrived to do or to attain" (3).[16] Although, as Michael K. Goldberg points out, in an earlier text, Carlyle "offered a more democratic and broadly based conception of history," here greatness is posited as the cornerstone of universal history and hero-worship (lxv).[17]

For Goldberg, Carlyle was not alone in voicing his fascination with the heroic, but tapping into "the mainstream of Victorian thought" (xxxiv). Walter E. Houghton sees hero worship as "a nineteenth-century phenomenon" (305). As Houghton writes, "[a]t no other time would it have been called 'the basis of all possible good, religious or social, for mankind'" (305).[18] In Houghton's view, the phenomenon derived in part from the Romantic "cult of enthusiasm" and its conception of genius as above ordinary men (306). Hero worship was also symptomatic of the latent crisis of belief in that heroes fulfilled some of the prophetic function of a messiah (Houghton 311). They also provided moral models in "a period in which the alarming increase of both the commercial spirit and religious doubt made moral inspiration a primary need" (Houghton 316).

The subject of Carlyle's 3rd lecture on heroes, the poet features in his pantheon as "a heroic figure belonging to all ages; whom all ages possess, when once he is produced," and Woolf's fictional poet Richard Alardyce clearly holds the status of hero in the novel (67). For Katharine, his biography represents "a duty they owed the world," a book whose ultimate aim is precisely to establish "indisputably that her grandfather was a great man" (*ND* 30). *Night and Day*, then, offers an early critique of Victorian biography and the ideological underpinnings of greatness and "ancestor worship." For the illustrious Hilberys, biographical writing is a family affair: "when one of them dies the chances are that another of them writes his biography" (*ND* 27).[19] The detail is significant, explaining both Mrs Hilbery and her

[16] "The Hero as Divinity. Odin. Paganism: Scandinavian Mythology," *On Heroes, Hero Worship, & the Heroic in History*, 3-36.
[17] "Social Life is the aggregate of all the individual men's Lives who constitute society; History is the essence of innumerable Biographies" ("On History" 1830, *Essays* 2:86, cited by Michael K. Goldberg, lxv).
[18] Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero Worship, & the Heroic in History*, Lecture IV, 106.
[19] "Hilberys" is the spelling used by Woolf herself in the novel to speak of the distinguished family collectively.

daughter's undertaking, as well as the nature of their involvement with the subject of the biography. The family's attitude to Alardyce's Life and its declared purpose – to confirm the poet's greatness – reflect Victorian practices rather than the post-Victorian world in which the novel is set. In other words, their endeavour constitutes yet another facet of the memorialization in place within the Hilbery home, hence the difficulty of reconciling the reality of the poet's life with what Andrea Zemgulys has termed a "memorial relationship" with the past (184).

This recalls Woolf's critique in "The Art of Biography," where "the majority of Victorian biographies" are compared to "the wax figures now preserved in Westminster Abbey, […] effigies that have only a smooth superficial likeness to the body in the coffin" (*CE*4: 222). In "The New Biography," published in 1927, Woolf offered another, similar view of biographical writing practices in the 19th century: "the Victorian biographer was dominated by the idea of goodness. Noble, upright, chaste, severe; it is thus that the Victorian worthies are presented to us" (*CE*4: 231). Both texts suggest that the moral constraints behind Victorian biography constituted a hindrance, resulting in lifeless "effigies," works "in which we go seeking disconsolately for voice or laughter, for curse or anger, for any trace that this fossil was once a living man" (*CE*4: 231).

The tension between the imperative of confirming the dead poet's greatness and a life difficult to contain within the expected biographical boundaries is expressed in Mrs Hilbery's anxiety about what to include in her father's biography, as well as the accumulation of biographical materials. These fill the space of writing in a similar fashion to the accumulating relics of Richard Alardyce's life: "Shelves and boxes bulged with the precious stuff" (*ND* 29). In a later scene, the arrival of "a heavily insured proof-sheet […] from a collector in Australia, which recorded a change of the poet's mind about a very famous phrase" forces Katharine to acknowledge that "the room was becoming crowded beyond the bounds of order" (*ND* 271).

The new arrival also raises questions as to the necessity of rearranging the existing relics: "Must it be hung on the staircase, or should some other relic give place to do it honour?" (*ND* 271). The two spaces – the space of the biography and the relics room – mirror each other; Katharine's dilemma about how to reorder the relics parallels that of Mrs Hilbery mapping out the biography while sifting through her memories as well as the wealth of information available.

The question of "what to leave in and what to leave out" – expressive of the desire to control the narrative of the poet's life – evokes the notion of censorship (*ND* 30). Thus, Mrs Hilbery "was of two minds" about "the period of his early manhood, when various affairs of the heart must either be concealed or revealed" (*ND* 31). As a result, "[s]everal years were now altogether omitted, because Mrs Hilbery had found something distasteful to her in that period" (*ND* 32).[20] The poet's failed marriage presented a similar problem, as a later scene suggests.

The scene underscores the tension between what the actual truth might have been and Mrs Hilbery's idealisation of her father, supported by public consecration: "it was for her sake, so people said, that he had cured himself of his dissipation, and become the irreproachable literary character that the world knows" (*ND* 82-3). Here, Katharine plays the part of the empathetic but objective observer, for whom "to comfort her mother […] was difficult […] when the facts themselves were so much of a legend" (*ND* 83). The young woman's doubts about the accuracy of Mrs Hilbery's reconstruction of the past coexist with a genuine interest in the details of the family story and the desire "to discuss them frankly," but the mother's filter on the past makes frankness impossible:

> […] for though Mrs Hilbery was constantly reverting to the story, it was always in this tentative and restless fashion, as though by a touch here and there she

[20] Here, moral judgements are cast in aesthetic terms. Mrs Hilbery's "distaste" in certain episodes of her father's life anticipates her labelling Katharine's idea of pursuing a relationship with Ralph unmarried as "ugly thoughts" (*ND* 412).

> could set things straight which had been crooked these sixty years. Perhaps, indeed, she no longer knew what the truth was. (*ND* 83)

The chapter ends suggestively on a scene of reading, in which Katharine proves unable "to interest her parents in the works of living and highly respectable authors" and has to revert to the classics to achieve the desired "sedative effect" (*ND* 84). Mrs Hilbery's wish for her daughter to read "something *real*" is indicative of the couple's instinctive retreat into a past which they chose to romanticise, in the same manner in which Mrs Hilbery, unreliable biographer, felt the need to airbrush the more discordant details of her father's life (*ND* 84).

By exposing Mrs Hilbery's reluctance to publicise her father's failed marriage, Woolf was, herself, committing something of a breach of familial loyalty and a biographical impiety towards Lady Anne Thackeray Ritchie, on whom the character of Mrs Hilbery was based.[21] For contemporary readers including Woolf's own relatives, the poet's unhappy marriage obliquely discussed in Chapter VII of the novel constituted "a paraphrase of the most private and pathetic episodes in the life of Lady Ritchie's father, the novelist W. M. Thackeray" (McCail 23). At the time, "[t]he full story of Thackeray's misfortunes was not yet public property since Lady Ritchie had refused to authorize a biography of her father" (McCail 24). Consequently, Woolf's use of the information in the novel as well as her fictional portrait of Lady Ritchie were received with displeasure, more particularly by Lady Ritchie's daughter Hester, who was prompted to write a memoir of her mother, published in 1924 (McCail 24). Woolf's response to the ensuing family controversy was not the most sympathetic. Nonetheless, she partly made up for it by writing a praising review of Lady Ritchie's novels in the obituary note of 6 March 1919 in the *Times Literary Supplement* (McCail 23-4).

The episode highlights not only the entanglements of familial loyalties in the memorialization of great men, but also the difficulties of Victorian biography torn between

[21] Despite being known as Aunt Annie, Lady Ritchie was only indirectly related to Woolf, whose father had been married to Thackeray's daughter Harriet (McCail 24).

the ideal of truthfulness to life and an allegiance to moral constraints, resulting in a "figure […] always above life-size in top-hat and frock-coat" (*CE*4: 231). *Night and Day* questions an attitude of uncritical ancestor worship, showing it to result in a gulf rather than a bridge between generations. This is conveyed through Katharine's experience of her legacy, whose progression consists in leaving behind a sense of complete abandonment in the retrospective glow of "the great age" in favour of a different kind of communion between generations (*ND* 29).

Repositionings

Katharine's difficult negotiation of her parents' legacy, shown to uphold and perpetuate gender roles which are restrictive for women, finds expression in the psychological portrayal of character in the novel. Ralph Denham's observation that Katharine "attended only with the surface skin of her mind" in the opening scene draws attention to the novel's construction of female interiority as frustratingly elusive to external observers (*ND* 6). The heroine's absent-mindedness articulates the psychological tension between her public and private selves, brought about by the demands placed upon her. The book repeatedly alludes to these irreconcilable selves, making Katharine a frustrating character, in some ways symptomatic of Woolf's evolving notion of character in fiction and her representation of the modernist self.

The young woman's awareness of this dissonance is explicitly expressed in the imaginary confession to her cousin Henry: "I'm a humbug – I mean, I'm not what you all take me for. I'm not domestic, or very practical or sensible, really" (*ND* 163). Her response to William Rodney's surprise at her forgetfulness yields a similar insight: "That's part of the myth about me" (*ND* 113). The "myth" is based on her domestic efficiency, but the real

Katharine remains perplexing, as Rodney's reply suggests: "I wonder […] what the truth about you is" (*ND* 113).

The skewed relationship between Katharine's room and her psychological interiority offers a good example of the discrepancy between her true nature and the roles she assumes in her parents' house. The room only partly accommodates secret pursuits such as the study of mathematics. The probability of sudden interruption – "Steps had only to sound on the staircase, and she slipped her paper between the leaves of a great Greek dictionary" – and the need for concealment show the limits of Katharine's freedom, anticipating the trope used in *A Room of One's Own* in relation to women and fiction (*ND* 34).[22] When given the opportunity to explore her cousin's room in the latter's absence, Cassandra "thought the bills stuck upon a skewer and stood for ornament upon the mantelpiece were astonishingly like Katharine" (*ND* 291). Fingering her books of mathematics, she mistakenly believes them to belong to Katharine's father and to have been "piously, though eccentrically, preserved by his daughter" (*ND* 291). Cassandra's misreading of this intimate space confirms the difficulty of "deciphering" Katharine and foregrounds the novel's critique of domesticity as incompatible with the protagonist's authentic self.

Katharine's silences function similarly in the novel as a source of misinterpretation and vexation, particularly challenging for the male protagonists. This is especially true for William Rodney, who sees in her behaviour the confirmation of his belief that "[s]he lives […] one of those odious, self-centred lives […] feeding her wits upon everything, having control of everything, getting far too much her own way at home" (*ND* 56). Rodney's criticism of what he perceives as Katharine's independence says less about Katharine and more about her suitor and his conservative, male-oriented expectations of women's roles. As

[22] Chapter IV of the essay reiterates the idea that "interruptions there will always be" and therefore, women's writing needed to adapt to the conditions in which they wrote (*AROO* 101). Speaking of Jane Austen, she pictures her "glad that a hinge creaked, so that she might hide her manuscript before anyone came in" (*AROO* 87).

Julia Briggs puts it, what he expects of Katharine is to "give up being a subject, and become an object, the object of his sonnet, the wife who will complete his sense of himself" ("Introduction" xxiii). In the light of his constant frustration with Katharine's lack of compliance with his wishes, the heroine's absent-mindedness functions as a form of transgression.

The novel consistently frames such moments of transgression and the protagonist's dissatisfaction spatially. Thus, alone in her room, she feels that "her life was so *hemmed in* with the progress of other lives that the sound of its own advance was inaudible," a thought explicitly linked to that of Mary's and Ralph's freedom: "People like Ralph and Mary had it all their own way, and an empty space before them" (*ND* 86, emphasis added). The appeal that this "empty space" holds for Katharine's imagination lies in its potential of freedom from psychological and material ties, to the effect that "this life made up of the dense crossings and entanglements of men, had no existence whatever" (*ND* 86). The "dense crossings and entanglements" mimic the labyrinthine geography of the city, just as "looking out into the shapeless mass of London" reinforces her sense "that there was one point and here another with which she had some connection" (*ND* 86). Katharine's shutting the window "with a sigh" at the end of her nocturnal reverie on the conclusion that "there was no way of escaping from one's fellow-beings" effectively conveys her sense of confinement (*ND* 86).

Such musings coexist with full-blown fantasies like "the taming of wild ponies upon the American prairies, or the conduct of a vast ship in a hurricane […] or […] others more peaceful, but marked by her *complete emancipation from her present surroundings*" (*ND* 34, emphasis added). Noting the masculine nature of these day-dreams, Julia Briggs argues that "Katharine's fantasies reveal her longing for a degree of power and control more often achieved my men, largely withheld from women and quite at odds with her society's

conception of marriage" ("Introduction" xxix).[23] An indirect warning on the subject comes from Lady Otway: "I really don't advise a woman who wants to have things her own way to get married," which marks a turning point in Katharine's view of her engagement (*ND* 177). The appeal of marriage to Rodney in the first half of the novel has less to do with love, and more with the wish for some degree of freedom, but as Katharine realises, her projection is an illusion. Katharine's desire is formulated in Ralph's presence as the heroine translates the young man's idea of taking up a cottage into her own ideal: "Two rooms are all I should want, […] one for eating, one for sleeping. Oh, but I should like another, a large one at the top, and a little garden where one could grow flowers" (*ND* 284).

Katharine's ideal of independent living is materialised in the figure of Mary Datchet, but the novel shows both the appeal and the limits of that model. The novel's polarity between the house in Cheyne Walk and Mary's flat, in which Katharine finds refuge from the strain of family life and conflicting emotions, is significant for the way in which Woolf uses space to define and question the roles she attributes her female characters. Mary's flat, "rather large and conveniently situated in a street mostly dedicated to offices off the Strand," illustrates the character's status as the new, independent and publicly active woman at the turn of the twentieth century, one who "had […] lost the look of the irresponsible spectator" (*ND* 36). In other words, Mary is a young woman with a room of her own and a sense of purpose, as suggested by Katharine's praise of her counterpart's living arrangements – "in such a room one could work – one could have a life of one's own" (*ND* 229).

Mary's aesthetic enjoyment of her living space, which – unlike the house in Cheyne Walk – allows in natural light more readily, highlights the contrast between the Strand flat

[23] For Briggs, day-dreams "provide the chief method of representing inner being" in the novel ("Introduction" xxvii).

and Katharine's Victorian home, and suggests a different relationship with rooms as nurturing space for Mary:

> High in the air as her flat was, some beams from the morning sun reached her even in November, striking straight at curtain, chair, and carpet, and painting there three bright, true spaces of green, blue, and purple, upon which the eye rested with a pleasure which gave physical warmth to the body. (*ND* 61)

As Victoria Rosner notes, the description of the flat as spots of colour is evocative of an abstract painting, but its implications go beyond the aesthetic: "[a]bstraction has the effect of purging reminiscence, stripping the home of its memorial qualities and replacing them with spontaneity. In Katharine's home, every object is irreplaceable by dint of its history" (157). The flat, on the other hand, is a versatile space, easily adaptable to different functions such as providing a meeting place "for purposes of enjoyment, or to discuss art, or to reform the State" (*ND* 36). Despite receiving people's request to use her rooms with a "frown of well-simulated annoyance," Mary takes proprietary pride in the fact "that she could rejoice equally in solitude, and in the presence of the very many different people who were now making their way, by divers paths, across London to the spot where she was sitting" (*ND* 36-7). This is one of the novel's network images, figuring Mary as

> […] the centre ganglion of a very fine network of nerves which fell over England, and one of these days, when she touched the heart of the system, would begin feeling and rushing together and emitting their splendid blaze of revolutionary fireworks […]. (*ND* 64)

The image is partly ironical, as is the treatment of Mary's fellow suffrage workers in the novel, expressive of Woolf's ambivalence towards the suffrage movement. Nevertheless, Mary's position in the novel as Katharine's counterpart gestures towards new possibilities and a sense of agency which the novel denies its upper-middle-class heroine.

As it were, Katharine's initial dilemma – whether "it was necessary for her very existence that she should free herself from the past" – remains largely unsolved (*ND* 32). The book, however, does suggest an alternative to the reverential relation described in the first half of the novel. Contemplating her grandfather's portrait, Katharine is suddenly struck by a sense of her ancestor not as someone to be worshipped but "as a man, young, unhappy, full of desires and faults" (*ND* 271). This new understanding triggers the insight that:

> He would have understood […]; and instead of laying her withered flowers upon his shrine, she brought him her own perplexities – perhaps a gift of greater value, […] than flowers and incense and adoration. Doubts, questionings, and despondencies she felt, as she looked up, would be more welcome to him than homage, and he would hold them but a very small burden if she gave him, also, some share in what she suffered and achieved. (*ND* 271)

This repositioning allows Katharine to envisage a more authentic relation with her legacy, one in which the past is allowed to share the modern subject's "doubts, questionings, and despondencies" – not as a source of answers but as a sympathetic partaker in the burden of modernity.

The novel's (subdued) happy ending undermines part of the critique articulated earlier, supporting negative readings of the book's conventionality. Nevertheless, its critical depiction of the Victorian home and memorialisation practices sanctioning the cult of "great men" anticipates the more polemical portrayal of the Pargiter household in *The Years*. Whereas here the house in Cheyne Walk perdures as a site where confusion and tensions are happily resolved, in the 1937 novel, modernity is figured through the dissolution of the Victorian home and its spatial articulation of gender and class inequalities.

Chapter 5

Trespassing: Spaces of Learning in *Jacob's Room*

The 1922 novel *Jacob's Room* is – in Benjamin Harvey's words – one of Woolf's two "'room' texts of the 1920s" alongside *A Room of One's Own*, published seven years later (103). The presence of the room trope in both titles gestures towards points of intersection between the two works, including their Oxbridge / British Museum settings, despite a number of more readily apparent differences. The "materialism" of the room in Woolf's 1929 essay contrasts with the more impressionistic space configuring Jacob's room in the novel. Similarly, the playfully polemical tone of the essay may appear at odds with the elegiac note of *Jacob's Room*, although, as I will show later, elegy in the novel coexists with strong elements of satire. Nevertheless, as this chapter shows, *Jacob's Room* anticipates *A Room of One's Own* in more than one way, interweaving formal conception with spatial politics.

The novel's writing history does not fully explain Woolf's choice of the spatial metaphor. When Woolf struck upon the idea for *Jacob's Room*, this came to her in the form of what one might call an *anti*-architectural image: the new novel was going to have "no scaffolding, scarcely a brick to be seen" (*D*2: 13). The image, recorded in the diary entry of 26 January 1920, is reminiscent of the 1919 essay "Modern Fiction," which questioned the writing of "materialist" authors such as Arnold Bennett. Borrowing the Jamesian image of "the house of fiction," Woolf criticises Bennett for being able to "make a book so well constructed and solid in its craftsmanship that it is difficult for the most exacting of critics to see through what chink or crevice decay can creep in. There is not so much as a draught between the frames of the windows, or a crack in the boards" (*CE*2: 104). Woolf's main concern is that such writing, figured as a perfectly crafted spatial structure, should fail to capture "life" (*CE*2: 105). In contrast, she views her new novel as a construct which precludes

architectural solidity, "all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright as fire in the mist" (*D*2: 13-14). Yet, "[l]et us suppose that the Room will hold it together," she jotted down as a preliminary reflection on beginning the novel in April 1920 (Bishop, *Virginia Woolf's* Jacob's Room 1).

This apparent contradiction is helpful in that it cautions against attempting to pin down the significance of "the room" in a novel where, as various critics have noted, its layered meanings lie at the confluence of physical, psychic and textual space. The room is Jacob's room at Cambridge, a formative male space which offers both the narrator and reader an insight into Jacob's "heritage" and the forces that shape his life. As critics such as Sue Roe have argued, the room also encapsulates Jacob's interiority, reconstructed out of fragments, as many angles of vision or points of entry into what is ultimately subject to an epistemological impasse. Thus, Jacob's unknowability represents the unknowability of the modern subject, but it is also a strategic narrative move designed to emphasise the narrator's outsider position and the idea of female exclusion. The spatial make-up of the novel with its open, multiple perspectives, signals that the narrator *cannot* know Jacob, just like the women orbiting around him.

The room is, of course, also the text itself, textual space being what ultimately holds, or at least provides traces of, Jacob. Edward L. Bishop, who has studied the holograph draft of the novel, has shown that the typographical layout of the novel as we know it is the result of a conscious editing process. In Bishop's words,

> At first Woolf divided her text only with numbered chapter divisions. After three months of writing she began using a row of 'x's to indicate subdivisions, and after six months she began to use space breaks in her manuscript book; thus the gaps, deliberate and considered, were part of the evolving shape of the novel. ("Mind the Gap" 34)

According to Bishop, at the time she was writing *Jacob's Room*, Woolf became increasingly aware of the importance of the shape of the text on the page as a result of her involvement with the Hogarth Press.[1] Bishop has suggested that the layered meaning of the room was constructed gradually in the process of writing, so that "[t]he final shape of the work and its true intent emerged only toward the end of the first draft, as Jacob (the public, the private, and the perceived being) and his room (the domicile, the psychic space, and the text itself) progressively defined one another" (*Virginia Woolf's* Jacob's Room xxiii).

This chapter argues that an examination of the novel in conjunction with what Kate Flint calls "the social and intellectual circumstances of its production" is apt to enrich our understanding of the political and aesthetic dimensions of Woolf's writing of rooms (378). As detailed in the next section, scholars have identified links between *Jacob's Room* and the piece known as "The Intellectual Status of Women," which Woolf wrote in 1920 in response to "Mr Bennett's adverse views reported in the papers" (*D*2: 69). The main focus of this chapter, however, is a previously unexplored context to the writing of the novel, namely Cambridge women's struggle for membership to the University, which started in the last decades of the nineteenth century and regained impetus in the wake of the First World War. As detailed in the next section, the events unfolding at Cambridge were discussed in – sometimes – passionate terms by the press as Woolf was writing *Jacob's Room*. Somewhat surprisingly, her diary and letters are silent on the subject at the time. Nevertheless, the topic occupies a central position in *Three Guineas*, where the appearance of the first women's colleges at Cambridge and the struggle for degrees and full membership are well documented, an indication that the topic was too important to have passed her by.

A closer look at these events, and the discourses around the "woman question" which they sparked, sheds new light on the spatial politics of the novel, as well as its author's

[1] According to Bishop, one text in particular, Hope Mirrlees's *Paris: A Poem* (1920), drew Woolf's attention to the significance of the spatial layout of the text ("Mind the Gap" 34). Hope Mirrlees was known to the Woolfs especially as Jane Ellen Harrison's companion during the last years of the scholar's life.

compositional choices. One editing decision in particular – the excision of a scene showing the Cambridge female quarters – is symbolic of the outcome of the Cambridge events. The removal of Angela Williams's room from the textual space of the novel is telling of Woolf's critique of Cambridge rooms as the spatial articulation of male privilege and female exclusion.

"Trouble Coming to Cambridge"

As Hermione Lee notes in her biography of Woolf, *Jacob's Room* marks a departure from her previous novels in that it is her first work focusing on the life of a young man. Lee sees the novel as "a kind of memoir" containing Woolf's "feelings about Thoby and her memories of Greece, pre-war London, Cambridge, and the early days of 'Bloomsbury'" (*Virginia Woolf* 436). The Cambridge chapter of the novel is, symbolically perhaps, set in 1906, the year that Thoby died of typhoid following the Stephen siblings' trip to Greece. Nevertheless, Woolf's depiction of Cambridge as a site of male privilege where women were at best tolerated, and her "erasure" of female students – discussed later on in the chapter – reverberate with the events unfolding at Cambridge at the time she was writing the novel.

As can be seen from the manuscript draft, Woolf composed the Cambridge chapter in 1920, the year she got involved in a debate about women's intellectual abilities in reaction to the publication of Arnold Bennett's *Our Women* and its subsequent praise by Desmond MacCarthy, alias "Affable Hawk," in the *New Statesman* on 2nd October 1920. Published under the heading "The Intellectual Status of Women," Woolf's response to Affable Hawk's article is significant both in relation to *Jacob's Room* and to her subsequent writing, especially *A Room of One's Own*. The piece reads as an early formulation of the ideas expressed and expanded in her 1929 essay. Woolf's counter-argument to Bennett and Affable Hawk's proclamation of women's inferiority is couched in "evolutionary" terms. As in *A*

Room of One's Own, she sees women's intellectual abilities not as a stable datum but as a continuum, the result of improvement from one century to the next:

> When I compare the Duchess of Newcastle with Jane Austen, the matchless Orinda with Emily Brontë, Mrs Heywood with George Eliot, Aphra Behn with Charlotte Brontë, Jane Grey with Jane Harrison, the advance in intellectual power seems to me not only sensible but immense […] and the effects of education and liberty scarcely to be overrated. (*D*2: 339)

The lack of a female tradition of illustrious writers comparable to that of the male canon is explained, as in the 1929 essay, in terms of the socio-economic privations – "some external restraint upon their powers" – which have governed women's lives (*D*2: 340). Taking Sappho and Lesbos as an example of a society where "women were not confined to the harem like Ionians" and "mixing freely with male society," Woolf argues not only for access to education but also for "liberty of experience" (*D*2: 340-1).

Jane Ellen Harrison, the famous Cambridge scholar whose name features both in Woolf's response to Affable Hawk and in *A Room of One's Own*, had expressed similar ideas in her own writing, more particularly in the essays "'Homo Sum': A Letter to an Anti-Suffragist from an Anthropologist" and "Scientiae Sacra Fames."[2] Writing about the necessity for women to have full access to knowledge in "Scientiae Sacra Fames," Harrison argued that

> When scientific men write of women, they often seem to lapse into medievalism, and to lose all faith, not only in evolution, but in their own experimental methods. […] We must free women before we know what they are fit for intellectually and morally. We must experiment. (139)

Earlier in the piece, Harrison addresses the issue of the demonization of women in medieval times and turns the medieval question of the nature of women – "are women human beings or

[2] Both published in *Alpha and Omega*, London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1915.

monsters?" – on its head, maintaining that women need knowledge precisely so that they can claim full humanity (118-119). As the citations above show, Woolf and Harrison display similar "theoretical and political positions" centred on the notion of women's intellectual freedom (Park 75).

In 1920 when Woolf wrote to the *New Statesman*, the issue of women's access to education had particular resonance as a new episode in Cambridge female students' struggle for degrees and full membership to the University began. Jane Ellen Harrison, a Classics tutor at Newnham from 1898 until 1922, was a first-hand witness to women's efforts. As Rita McWilliams Tullberg has documented, the 1920 turmoil was due to a new, post-war attempt to obtain equal rights for Cambridge women after a failed campaign in 1897. Back in 1895, Harrison, a Newnham Associate, "had signed a resolution 'that in the opinion of the Associates of Newnham College, the Senate should be asked to admit women to membership of the University and to University degrees'" (Robinson 284).

The war allowed women to prove themselves in domains otherwise restricted to men, a contribution which Cambridge failed to recognise, putting up fierce resistance to what had become normal practice for other higher education institutions. As Tullberg notes, "[b]y 1914, there were fourteen universities and university colleges in England and Wales offering women higher education and full and equal recognition with men" (120). The University of Oxford, Cambridge's direct rival, gave women full membership in 1919 "with scarcely any disturbance" (Tullberg 121). When the first degrees to women were issued by Oxford in May 1920, Jane Ellen Harrison wrote to her life-long friend Gilbert Murray, then Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford: "I gnash my teeth when I think of all yr Somerville young women preening its [sic] in cap & gown – so like Oxford & so low to start after us & get in first!" (Robinson 284).

The new chapter in the Cambridge struggle started in 1918, when a memorandum was issued urging for a reconsideration of women's status at Cambridge and the granting of full membership to female students (Tullberg 123). The initiative set in motion a slow process leading to the delivery of a report in May 1920, whose outcome was a tie with six members supporting women's claim and six stipulating against it (Tullberg 132-137). An article in *The Evening Standard* of Thursday, 7 October 1920, summarised this ironically as "the highly successful result that its deliberations reached absolute deadlock" ("Women Students at Cambridge" 5). The "deadlock" consisted in the issue of two competing reports, advising two alternative courses of action. Report A "recommended that women should be admitted to full membership, with certain limitations"; in contrast, report B rejected the claim suggesting that Newnham and Girton should form an entity independent from Cambridge (Tullberg 132-137). The latter was a disguised form of exclusion and was understood as such by both Girton and Newnham, which rejected report B and declared report A as the course of action more likely to serve their cause (Tullberg 138). In the run-up to the vote scheduled on 8 December 1920, the debate continued both within Cambridge grounds and in the wider public arena.

The title of the *The Evening Standard* article of 7 October – "Women Students at Cambridge. Dons of the Old Guard Horror Stricken over Idea of Granting Them Degrees" – and its ominous announcement that "[t]here is trouble coming to Cambridge" give a flavour of the tone of the debate around the Cambridge events at the time Woolf was writing *Jacob's Room* and her response to "Affable Hawk." The article, describing Cambridge as "a ferment of committees and parties" with "fly-sheets for and against whirl[ing] from the press," explains that,

> Woman, having been quiet at the University for twenty-three years (the years during which she has forced her way into Parliament and Local Authorities, Government departments, the legal and medical professions, and even into

> Oxford) has raised her head at last, and threatens to rend the august Senate of Cambridge in twain. (5)

Despite its attempt at journalistic objectivity, the article cannot help conveying a certain sense of discomfort with women's increased access to education and the professions. The idea of woman "forcing her way in" amounts to a discourse of female intrusion, a discourse which played a significant part in the debate raging at Cambridge. Summarising the stakes of the vote, *The Evening Standard* noted:

> The joke is that even should woman get all she asks, it will make no perceptible difference to undergraduate life. Students of Newnham and Girton already attend lectures with the men, sit for all Honours examinations, and are placed in the lists. Only, when they pass, they do not get the degrees which they have earned. ("Women Students at Cambridge" 5)

This was not exactly how things stood. Attending lectures was not a right but depended upon the "courtesy of the lecturer concerned"; moreover, library use by women, including the female teaching staff, was placed under the same restrictions as for "members of the public" (Tullberg 131-2). Female staff at Girton and Newnham, although "recognised as having high academic ability by their male colleagues […] were excluded from all discussion and decisions on syllabuses and the setting and marking of examinations" (Tullberg 132).

Clearly, the Cambridge debate was about women claiming rights which were felt to be men's preserve. Women's struggle was seen as an attempt to encroach upon men's space, literally as well as symbolically, a fear perfectly captured by the catch-phrase in the run-up to the 1920 vote: "a woman with a degree would take up no more room than one without a degree" (Tullberg 150). *The Evening Standard* article evokes the phrase and makes the political implications of women gaining "more room" very clear: "The pessimists say that a woman with the letters M.A. after her name takes no more room than one without. To which

the Antis reply that she does – she takes room on the Senate" (5). As the author of the article goes on the explain, "[u]nder the present Constitution a graduate automatically becomes a Senator with a vote, and the dons of the old guard are horror-stricken at the notion of Cambridge being governed by women" (5).[3] Granting degrees to women would have meant a shift in the balance of power within the University and an acknowledgement of women's presence there other than "on sufferance," as the special correspondent to *The Evening Standard* put it (5).

Addressing such fears, Miss B. A. Clough, the principal of Newnham interviewed in the same article, noted that the male – female student ratio did not justify "that the men c[ould] feel themselves to be unduly crowded by the women" and that "there [was] plenty of opportunity for the men to keep to themselves" (5).[4] Nor could men entertain fears of larger numbers of female students at Cambridge or of women's colleges being extended, since all these aspects were under the University's jurisdiction. Arguing that "[t]he association of girl and men students is very definitely regulated," Clough judged the degree of freedom in male - female contact to be similar to that of the outside world, pointing out that Cambridge could not be "a University of monasteries and nunneries, a sort of island secluded from all the rest of normal life" (5).

The target of Clough's criticism – the outdated model of segregation derived from the university's ecclesiastical origins and tradition – was, however, still dear to the reactionary party at Cambridge and some members of the public, for whom the relaxation of the strict rules governing male-female interactions on University grounds was a sign of dissolution. In May 1919, Newnham College Council agreed to less strict rules of chaperonage, so young men and women had more freedom as to how and where to meet, whether it be in tea shops, on the river or in their own rooms (Tullberg 143-4). *The Daily Mail* called these new

[3] The name of the author is only given in initials (R.A.C) at the end of the article.
[4] B. A. Clough was the niece of Anne Jemima Clough, first Principal of Newnham. Woolf read Blanche Athena Clough's *A Memoir of Anne Jemima Clough* in preparation for *The Pargiters* (Snaith, *Virginia Woolf* 105).

freedoms "a social revolution […] terrifying some of the older school," and proclaimed that Cambridge was "a new place in regard to its social life; and there is great sighing and sobbing over the 'cloistral virtues' that are no more" ("No Tete-a-Tete College Teas" 7).

Cambridge's reputation "as a sanctuary or a cloistral refuge" was something which Woolf, too, found particularly adapted to her critique (Park 70). As detailed later in the chapter, the King's College Chapel scene in *Jacob's Room* and its repudiation of women as interfering with the male ritual under way function as one such reminder. Jacob himself associates his education with "cloistered rooms" when experiencing a moment of rebellion in a later chapter of the book: "He had a violent reversion towards male society, cloistered rooms, and the works of the classics; and was ready to turn with wrath upon whoever it was who had fashioned life thus" (*JR* 110). At the end of the passage, he comes to the conclusion that "cloisters and classics are no use whatever" (*JR* 111).

In the heated debate at Cambridge, the issue of the University's very nature being threatened by women's invasion played a central part. A flysheet issued at Cambridge in December 1920, although not entirely hostile to women, read that increasing numbers of female students would spoil the nature of Cambridge and "impair the heritage of men" (Tullberg 142). The flysheet advocated segregation – independent men's and women's universities – as the best way to preserve Cambridge's system of "free intercourse of men of congenial minds" (Tullberg 141). Similarly, in *The Evening Standard* of Monday, 6 December 1920, a mother protested about her right to send her sons to a male-only University (12).

The selection of readers' responses published alongside the mother's protest offers further insight into the scope and tenor of the debate.[5] Thus, a former Newnham student,

[5] The untitled section of the newspaper which features this selection speaks of the "wide interest created by recent articles […] on the question of the admission of women to membership of the University of Cambridge" and "the many letters which correspondents have addressed to us on the subject" (12).

"Miss Constance F. Elam, New Barnet," rejects the idea that women's aim is to gain power rather than the recognition of their academic achievements (12). Another respondent points out that excluding women on the grounds of overcrowding is an injustice since some men see the University as a "pleasure resort" and "go there to amuse themselves" (12). Another reader addresses the accusation of women "philandering" by arguing that "most of the women have neither the time nor the desire" for it, and predicts that "[o]ne day the nation will wake up to the fact that it is just as important for the benefit of the race to educate its women as its men" (12). Yet another respondent complains that "[w]omen, by sheer weight of numbers, tend to swamp all institutions to which they are admitted" and concludes that "[t]he great mistake has been in allowing women to attend men's universities at all. It is not too late to remedy this error and to make them either form universities of their own, or go without" (12).

One anonymous piece in *The Daily News* of Thursday, 27 May 1920, gives an astute answer to the notion of keeping male and female students separate under the heading "The Harem System." Acknowledging the strain put on professors by larger numbers of students, the author deems "some of the arguments for universities devoted only to women [...] almost cogent, but tested by realities they fly to pieces" ("The Harem System" 4). The modern reality which the piece puts forth is that

> In all the modern universities men and women work together and the best win. [...] It would be difficult to convince those who think otherwise that they are sharing the attitude of a mediæval Turk debased by jealousy of the modern woman's capacity, but the conclusion is hard to escape. ("The Harem System" 4)

The harem image is akin to the earlier notion of Cambridge's "mediaeval" attitude towards women in its androcentrism and the emphasis on men's desire for monopoly on knowledge. In her response to "Affable Hawk" the same year, Woolf also used the harem image as an

example of gendered spatial segregation in ancient Greece, precisely to reinforce the idea that freedom was an absolute condition for women's intellectual growth.

Several years earlier, Jane Ellen Harrison had formulated a similar critique in "Homo Sum. Being a Letter to an Anti-Suffragist from an Anthropologist." In her essay, Harrison examines men's monopoly on the social sphere and women's segregation from social life in primitive societies by discussing the institution of the "Man's House," a space whose "sanctity" is built on the exclusion of women (108). Harrison points out that, whilst some of her contemporaries' views on the differences between the two sexes were still "based on arguments drawn from primitive sociology," the Man's House was a model doomed to break down as "it left out half of humanity, woman" (110). As Sowon S. Park has noted, Harrison does not make any explicit reference to Cambridge, but her discussion of the Man's House reads as an indirect critique of the androcentric values still very much in place there (75).

The result of the vote which took place on 8 December 1920 was a disheartening one for Cambridge women, report A being "defeated by 192 votes" (Tullberg 152). In yet another letter to her Oxford friend Gilbert Murray, Harrison wrote on the occasion:

> the old weary struggle about the vote begins again & all the fierce young disappointed ones come seething back & it is all as you say so 'silly' & so small. Of course we shall get it and I think soon, but only now I fear thro' much bitterness, thro' outside compulsion. (Robinson 284-5)

Harrison was right to foresee that the University's resistance would inevitably wane, but less so as to when that would happen. It took Cambridge another twenty-seven years and a second world war to grant women full membership. The "bitterness" Harrison feared came soon enough. In 1921, a new vote took place "this time with a second, compromise proposal: to grant titular degrees by diploma to women (i.e. allowing them to put the letters BA after their name) without allowing them to graduate or become members of the university" (Robinson

285). The vote was carried out in a feverish atmosphere, with the older men "being animated by a passion of anti-feminism in proportion to their years" (Robinson 285).[6] The outcome – the decision to grant women titular degrees only – resulted in a surge of frenzy and the smashing down of Newnham College's Clough Memorial Gates by the mob, hence Harrison's bitter comment in another letter to Gilbert Murray: "It has been all so disgusting. I stood by & saw those young wild beasts break down the beautiful gates" (Robinson 286). Writing about this incident in *Three Guineas*, Woolf saw it as proof that "education, the finest education in the world, does not teach people to hate force, but to use it" and that, "far from teaching the educated generosity and magnanimity, [it] makes them on the contrary [...] anxious to keep their possessions" (193).

In 1947, when a new committee was appointed and a new vote organised, the claim met little resistance. The Grace passed in December 1947 and "[t]the new Statuses received the Royal Assent in May 1948 but by some oversight they were undated and thus became immediately operative" (Tullberg 180-3). Thus, the long fought-for result did not come during Woolf's lifetime. In 1937, when she wrote her account of Cambridge women's struggle in *Three Guineas*, she reminded her fictional correspondent:

> At Cambridge, in the year 1937, the women's colleges [...] are not allowed to be members of the university; and the number of educated men's daughters who are allowed to receive a university education is still strictly limited; though both sexes contribute to the university funds. (194)[7]

In 1920, when she was working on *Jacob's Room*, the Cambridge debate was far from over. As shown earlier, a considerable amount of passion fed into the different discourses revolving around the "woman question." Woolf's spatial critique of patriarchy in *Jacob's*

[6] In the words of M. E. Henn, a student at the time, recorded in Phillips, Ann (ed), *A Newnham Anthology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, 150.
[7] Quoting *The Student's Handbook to Cambridge* 1934-5, Woolf echoes the Principal of Newnham Miss B. A. Clough's remark about the cap on female student numbers.

Room echoes these discourses. Moreover, her choice to "silence" her fictional Cambridge women by removing an important scene from the earlier draft of the novel can be read as a response to the discourse of female intrusion underlying the Cambridge debate. By making Cambridge female undergraduates' presence invisible and therefore positioning women as outsiders, Woolf reinforces her critique of male privilege, whose architectural realization is Cambridge itself.

Male Spaces of Learning: The "Romance of Cambridge"[8]

Cambridge played an essential part in the intellectual life of the Stephen family as well as within the circle of young intellectuals later known as the Bloomsbury group. As such, it left an indelible mark on Woolf, despite the "deep ambivalence" towards Cambridge culture repeatedly expressed in her writing (Park 77). In Woolf's own words, "Much though I hate Cambridge, and bitterly though I've suffered from it, I still respect it. I suppose that even without education [...] I am [...] of that narrow, ascetic, puritanical breed" (*L*4: 155).

If Woolf herself did not benefit from a Cambridge education, she had indirect access to Cambridge thinking and culture through her father, her brother Thoby and her Bloomsbury friends. Her father, Leslie Stephen studied there and "began adult life as a Cambridge don and clergyman" (Rosenbaum, *Victorian Bloomsbury* 38). Although he eventually renounced the priesthood following his loss of faith, his subsequent work remained marked by Cambridge thinking.[9] As to Woolf's Bloomsbury circle, "all the men of Bloomsbury but Duncan Grant went to Cambridge, where all but Bell were members of [...] the Cambridge Apostles," the famous student society founded in 1820 (Rosenbaum, *Victorian Bloomsbury* 11).

[8]Here I am taking up and adapting Lynne T. Hanley's term "Romance of Oxbridge" whose use I explain below.
[9] For a detailed discussion of the influence of Cambridge on Leslie Stephen and Bloomsbury, see S. P. Rosenbaum, *Victorian Bloomsbury: The Early Literary History of the Bloomsbury Group* Volume I, Macmillan Press, 1987.

Woolf's ambivalence about Cambridge derived from her sense of exclusion from the kind of education to which she aspired, an exclusion reinforced by Cambridge's strong anti-feminist ethos. In Sowon S. Park's words, in Woolf's time, Cambridge "was, arguably, the most aggressively anti-feminist institution in Britain" (69). Taking up the term "romance" used by Vera Brittain to express her excitement about Oxford in *Testament of Youth*, Lynne T. Hanley identifies a similar streak of youthful reverence in Woolf's attitude towards the academic establishment. Consequently, she sees Woolf evolving from the less critical stance adopted in her earlier works to the indictment formulated in *Three Guineas*. In Hanley's view, whereas in the 1938 essay, Woolf establishes a clear link between the war and the militaristic ethos underlying male education, *Jacob's Room* "presents Oxbridge men more as victims than as purveyors of war" (423). Hanley's article, chiefly concerned with *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, makes only a brief, passing reference to *Jacob's Room*. However, her observation about the ambivalent status of "Oxbridge men" in the novel constitutes a useful starting point. Jacob is a victim of war, but the novel presents him in turns as endorsing, resisting as well as perpetuating the values and attitudes justifying military conflict and gender discrimination.

Nicholas Midgley, too, reads *Jacob's Room* conjointly with *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, examining the ways in which Woolf throws into question the "grand narrative of human progress" underlying the idea of university education, the equivalent of the earlier Christian ethos (150). In Midgley's words, "[l]ike the medieval university, which saw learning as part of the grand narrative of Christian redemption, the modern university encouraged 'the pursuit of truth' as part of a grand narrative of human progress" (150). In Midgley's view, *Jacob's Room* shows how the First World War destroyed this narrative (151). Woolf's subversion of the conventions of the Bildungsroman serves this purpose: Jacob, "the direct inheritor of the Idea of the University of Culture," does not follow the

Bildungsroman hero's trajectory towards enlightenment (Midgley 151-2). It is not just that Jacob's life is cut short by the war, but that the University does not prepare him for the realities of politics and war. According to Midgley, this indicates that "for Woolf, the whole legitimation of the educational system itself is thrown into question" (152).

Thus, Cambridge lies at the heart of Woolf's critique of patriarchy as a space which imprints its values onto Jacob's psyche, a site of male education and male bonding which marginalises or excludes women. The Cambridge chapter of the novel, which places Jacob in the context of Cambridge male education, provides the focal point for Woolf's spatial exploration of the socio-cultural influences that mould him. However, unlike in *The Years*, where Woolf creates more "solid" descriptions of material spaces, the description of Cambridge and Jacob's room is written in the more impressionistic style with which she was experimenting at the time. The Cambridge scene unfolds directly after Jacob's train journey there, in a tone which blends lyricism and irony, and whose mock solemnity anticipates the strong elements of satire present in the "old dons" vignette halfway through the passage. Woolf grounds her critique in several sites across Cambridge – King's College Chapel, Professor Plumer's villa, the undergraduates' quarters and the three old dons' rooms – all of which emphasise the idea that male privilege is maintained by a number of spatial configurations.

King's College Chapel is a suggestive start to the description in that it is evocative of the monastic origins of the University and the union of "'the sacred' and the politically powerful" (Ingram 136). The allusion to a time when the college-monastery was a space closed to women functions as a reminder of the relation between male privilege and spatial regulation. As Sowon S. Park has shown, in earlier centuries, this type of regulation took the concrete form of a penitentiary for "women who were judged to be compromising the morals of the undergraduates" (71). The Spinning House (1631-1894), whose abuses are documented

by Park, stood as the spatial embodiment of the University's self-granted right to control female intrusion.[10] Although the model of regulation symbolised by the Spinning House became obsolete at the end of the nineteenth century, the discourse of female trespass upon an essentially masculine space of learning persisted. The terms of the debate over Cambridge women's rights discussed in the previous section of the chapter illustrate this. As shown below, *Jacob's Room* also echoes this discourse, translating it into the protagonist's thoughts during the religious service in the Chapel.

The focus on Cambridge and King's College Chapel at the beginning of the chapter is effected through the trope of light, the figuration of the idea of knowledge in the passage. The "lighter, thinner, more sparkling" sky above the university town invites the ironic question whether Cambridge "burn[s] not only into the night, but into the day" (*JR* 38). The irony anticipates the "three dons" vignette, in which the light coming from the professors' rooms conflates space, occupants and their academic expertise, forming an aura at odds with the less distinguished aspects of their personas. Light also frames the ritual inside the Chapel and its "orderly procession" of "white gowns" (*JR* 38). Significantly, its visual harmony is disrupted by the dissonant note of the "great boots march[ing] under the gowns," an allusion to war anticipating Jacob's death (*JR* 38). The oblique critique of ceremony and dress in the passage anticipates the point made in *Three Guineas*, where Woolf links male dress – designed "to advertise the social, professional, or intellectual standing of the wearer" – with patriarchy and militarism (*TG* 179). The gowns seemingly cover "nothing dense and corporeal" while "sculpted faces" mask "vacant" minds such as Jacob's (*JR* 38). The automata-like faces express the empty solemnity of the age-old ceremonial perpetuated by generation after generation of young men, but the image may also be suggestive of the students' rarefied existence.

[10] See "Apostolic Mind and the Spinning House: Jane Ellen Harrison and Virginia Woolf's Discourse of Alterity," 72.

The narrator's ironic explanation for Jacob's lapse of attention – for the young man "looked extraordinarily vacant, his head thrown back, his hymn-book open at the wrong place" – resides in women's colourful presence in the church (*JR* 39). Their sight prompts the reflection that "[n]o one would think of bringing a dog into church," a thought which directly casts women in the role of intruders, recalling Samuel Johnson's quote about women preaching to which Woolf alludes in *A Room of One's Own*. Here, too, women's presence is felt as a form of transgression, an idea reinforced by the metaphor of spatial regulation according to which "a dog is all very well on a gravel path" but a disgrace "down an aisle" (*JR* 39-40).[11] The misogyny of Jacob's thought sets into relief the Cambridge attitude to women, reiterated later on in the novel, for instance, in Jacob's behaviour towards Florinda. The 1929 essay develops this theme, striking a chord with readers like Margaret E. Thomas, whose letter of 28 October 1929 from Girton testifies to the "strong […] disdain for women up here" (Daugherty, "Letters from Readers" 62).[12]

Professor Plumer's villa, the second site on the narrative tour of Cambridge, named "Waverley" after Walter Scott's series of novels, is the setting for a prosaic domestic scene performed by way of "entertain[ing] undergraduates" in sharp contrast with the romantic spirit evoked by its name (*JR* 40). As the narrator acknowledges, "anything more horrible than the scene, the setting, the prospect […] cannot be imagined" (*JR* 41). The emphasis here is on the figure of the professor's wife, whose domestic status underscores the disparity between men and women's opportunities. The villa itself is suggestively located "on the road to Girton" (*JR* 40), an allusion to Mrs Plumer's lack of ambitions of her own apart from "pushing George Plumer ahead of her to the top of the ladder" (42). In the holograph draft, the wife's portrait is more detailed than in the published novel, and Jacob's dismissal of her, more explicit: "No, no, no, M$^{rs.}$ Plumer was not a nice woman" (Bishop, *Virginia Woolf's*

[11] For a discussion of Woolf's feminist use of the dog metaphor, see Jane Goldman, "Ce chien est à moi: Virginia Woolf and the Signifying Dog", *Woolf Studies Annual* 13 (2007): 49-86.
[12] A more detailed discussion of Thomas's letter can be found in Chapter 2 of this study.

Jacob's Room 31). Like Mrs Plumer, her daughters – who "came to the drawing-room, in white frocks and blue sashes" and "handed the cigarettes," a ritual reminiscent of Woolf's "tea-table training" – benefit from the narrator's ironic exoneration: "It was none of *their* fault either" (*JR* 42-3). Jacob's aversion "at the world shown him at lunch-time" is ambivalent, a mixture of contempt and pity which extends to the "[t]hose wretched little girls," who inherited their father's eyes but not their "abstract light" (*JR* 43-4). As in the "old dons" scene, the abstract light in Professor Plumer's eyes symbolises knowledge, and stresses the gender imbalance derived from access to education. The disparity between men and women and the resulting "psychological divide" to which Woolf alludes here are a central concern in *The Years*, for which she read extensively on women and education (Snaith, *Virginia Woolf* 95-7). The passage prefigures the treatment of the relationship between male and female siblings in her 1937 novel. Moreover, the Plumers anticipate the Malones and Kitty's dissatisfaction with the role to which her status as Dr. Malone's daughter confines her.

The description of Jacob's room, introduced by the lyrical motif of "[t]he feathery white moon," albeit sketchy and impressionistic, offers insight into the cultural influences that form his Cambridge education (*JR* 48). These range from Greek studies to Spinoza, Dickens and Carlyle, among others. Unsurprisingly, Carlyle sits on Jacob's bookshelf in his Cambridge room as "a prize," telling of the intellectual tradition into which the young man is educated and whose ultimate outcome is his death in the war. For Michael Whitworth, the Carlyle reference also serves as an oblique allusion to Woolf's subversion of Bildungsroman and biographical conventions. The novel can be read "as a parodic biography" whose "biographer narrator […] has been set the task of writing a standard two-volume biography of Jacob as a 'great man'" following him through all the important stages of his life from "his childhood, his education at Cambridge, his youthful exploits" through to "his mature achievements in some area of literature or statesmanship, his public recognition, his happy old

age" (Whitworth, *Virginia Woolf* 106-7). Jacob's life precludes the expected narrative of growth and masculine achievement, showing that his Cambridge education leaves him unprepared for the reality of politics and war. Thus, the essay "Does History consist of the Biographies of Great Men?" lying on the table appears to undermine ideological discourses such as the equation of history with hero-worship. Symptomatically, Jacob's questioning of Carlyle's statement on greatness remains inconclusive.

Woolf's choice of exploring Jacob's room in his absence problematises the synecdochic relation between the young man and the space which is supposed to function as an index of his personality.[13] It is not quite certain whether the contents of the room represent a gloss on his personal tastes or an eclectic sample of any Cambridge undergraduate's reading. In the manuscript draft, the room is described as typical of "most undergraduate's [sic] rooms" but the line is crossed out, suggesting Woolf's indecision about the extent to which Jacob was to be portrayed as the average male undergraduate (Bishop, *Virginia Woolf's* Jacob's Room 37). Addressing criticism of Jacob's empty room as an indication of his elusiveness, Hermione Lee argues that the reader retains a "positive sense […] of Jacob, if not as an individual, then as a figure of a recognizable class, at a particular time, doomed to a particularly tragic fate" (*The Novels of Virginia Woolf* 84). Lee sees the more "matter-of-fact" elements of the description as an indirect "satire on the young Cambridge man's intellectual life, with its absurd mixture of literary influences, and its obeisance to Elizabethan and Greek culture," which coexists with its more elegiac notes (*The Novels of Virginia Woolf* 83).

Jacob's absence from his Cambridge room can be interpreted as a multi-layered form of resistance: Jacob's resistance to the patriarchal educational system represented by Cambridge and the ideologies circulated by the different texts in the room, the character's resistance to the narrator's attempt to pin him down, but also Woolf's own resistance to the

[13] Commenting on the fact that the holograph draft contained more rooms than the published version of the novel, Edward L. Bishop notes "that Woolf is using rooms as an index of characters" (*Virginia Woolf's* Jacob's Room xii).

imperative of fixing identity. However, when read in conjunction with the last scene of the novel, the protagonist's absence from his Cambridge room is also a suggestion of his capitulation to the system which brings about his death in the war. Drawing a parallel between *Jacob's Room* and the Cenotaph, "the central British War memorial in London," Robert Reginio reads the novel as a "counter-monument" aiming precisely to subvert the idea of hero-worship (86). Thus, for Reginio, Jacob's empty room is not unlike the Cenotaph, a kind of "empty tomb" (87).

The next stop on the tour of Cambridge is the old dons' quarters, the seat of authority and knowledge claiming Jacob and other young men as its intellectual products. Here, the tone becomes decidedly satirical. The portrayal of Professors Huxtable, Sopwith and Cowan recalls the treatment of the "don type" by contemporary newspapers reporting on the Cambridge events in 1920. In one such account, "a fine old don" complaining about how "pushing" young women had become, was described as "cosily tucked into the recesses of a library," an image suggestive of the spatial reinforcement of male privilege ("Women Students at Cambridge" 5). In her vignette, Woolf, too, establishes a close connection between the human and the spatial, ideology and built space. The three dons, literal luminaries as it were, are one with their rooms: "Greek burns here; science there; philosophy on the ground floor" (*JR* 49). The professors are, as one would expect, priestly-looking, but their mannerisms and physical ailments interfere with their aura of learned authority, and solemnity veers towards ridicule:

> Poor old Huxtable can't walk straight; – Sopwith, too, has praised the sky any night these twenty years; and Cowan still chuckles at the same stories. […] how priestly they look! How like a suburb where you go to see a view and eat a

> special cake! "We are the sole purveyors of this cake." Back you go to London; for the treat is over. (*JR* 49-50) [14]

Woolf's domestic simile turns the three professors into pitiable creatures, subject, like all mortals, to the decay of flesh. Thus, when Old Professor Huxtable removes his glasses, "[t]he whole flesh of his face […] fell into folds as if props were removed" (*JR* 50). Huxtable's brain, however, compensates for the somewhat canine physiognomy by becoming a dome "populous with ideas" (*JR* 50). The image mirrors the novel's later British Museum scene where the Reading Room dome encompasses "an enormous mind" (*JR* 147). In the manuscript draft, Huxtable's portrait is shorter and the Reading Room scene is absent, which suggests that Woolf's later additions aimed to reinforce this parallel, thus "deepening the element of political satire" from the draft to the published text (Bishop, *Virginia Woolf's* Jacob's Room, xxi). The terms in which the thought processes occurring in Huxtable's spatialised brain are couched – "a procession […] orderly, quick-stepping," "the march," "such a muster" – link the seemingly inoffensive Cambridge professor to the menacing reality of militarization, showing the production of knowledge and the education system to be essential to the war machine.

Sopwith, the second venerable Cambridge professor, is pictured in his room surrounded by undergraduates, "[t]alking, talking, talking – as if everything could be talked" (*JR* 51). The male-only society and Sopwith's passing down ideas like "thin silver disks which dissolve in young men's minds" is evocative of the master – disciple relationship of Greek antiquity, a suggestion reinforced by Sopwith's love of manliness and the reference to "a Greek boy's head" (*JR* 51-2). The narrator's ambivalence is thematised in the scene through the character of Stenhouse – "old Chucky," as Sopwith calls him condescendingly –

[14] Sue Roe links Woolf's irreverence in this passage with her "disappointment in G. E. Moore" (164). Moore, an important influence on the Bloomsbury circle, is described in the diary entry of 23 June 1920 as somewhat diminished and not the "dominator and dictator of youth" she had imagined: "He has grown grey, sunken, toothless perhaps. His eyes small, watchful, but perhaps not so piercing as of old. A lack of mass, somewhere" (*D*2: 49).

who both envies and resists the ritual taking place in the professor's room: "all seemed to him childish, absurd; the chocolate cake, the young men; Sopwith summing things up; no, not all; he would send his son there. He would save every penny to send his son there" (*JR* 51-2).

A similar form of bonding takes place a few pages later in the undergraduates' quarters, viewed through the lens of the narrator's outsider perspective: "the window being open, one could see how they sat – legs issuing here, one there crumpled in a corner of the sofa; and presumably, for you could not see him, somebody stood by the fender, talking" (*JR* 56).[15] The undergraduates appear engaged in intellectual activities but the few indications of physical contact carry covert sexual overtones which, like Sopwith's love of manliness, anticipate the episode devoted to Edward Pargiter's Oxford life in *The Years*. There, the outsider position endorsed by the female narrator in *Jacob's Room* is occupied by Kitty Malone, whose limited access to the source of merriment in the undergraduates' quarters mirrors the narrator's restricted angle of vision in the 1922 novel.

Outsiders: Writing Absence

The Cambridge chapter emphasises women's absence, making Miss Umphelby the only representative of female academic life in this section of the novel. In a move anticipating the comparison between men and women's colleges in *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf juxtaposes the figure of the modest female lecturer "taking her way up the avenue towards Newnham" with Erasmus Cowan sipping port (*JR* 52-3). Miss Umphelby is a pale counterpart to the distinguished professor, despite their common preoccupation with Virgil. Her "lectures […] are not half so well attended as those of Cowan, and the thing she might have said in elucidation of the text for ever left out" (*JR* 53), a silence symbolic of "the censorship of women's language" (Roe 164). In *The Years*, she metamorphoses into Miss Craddock, the

[15] As critics have noted, Woolf makes her narrator's sexual identity explicit in the scene in which Jacob sees Florinda "upon another man's arm" (*JR* 127).

marginalised female scholar at Oxford, while the Plumers reappear in the guise of the Malones. Thus, the Cambridge section of the novel configures the University as a space of male privilege where women are marginalised and, like Miss Umphelby, kept on the periphery of academia in the same way that the narrator is limited to looking in through the open window. However, female exclusion is not confined to academia; on the contrary, it is a theme that runs throughout the novel, as suggested by the many female characters, "mothers, girlfriends, wives, students, debutantes, prostitutes, art-models […] placed in Jacob's room as furniture he overlooks or makes use of" (Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 437).

If the published version of the novel limits the female presence at Cambridge to Miss Umphelby, this was not the case in the manuscript draft. The latter contained a vignette of female student life at Newnham College, later deleted and published as the short piece "A Woman's College from Outside" in *Atalanta's Garland* in 1926 (Bishop, *Virginia Woolf's* Jacob's Room xii-xiii). As Edward L. Bishop has noted, the deleted scene constitutes one of several rooms initially included in the novel (xii). In the draft, Angela Williams – the young woman on which the vignette focuses – functions as Jacob's counterpart, while the other female characters in the passage mirror the scene taking place in the male quarters. The description of the Newnham room, introduced by the same lyrical passage as that of Jacob's room, confirms the intended parallelism between the two.

In his introduction to the holograph draft, Edward L. Bishop explains the omission of the Angela Williams scene in compositional terms, positing that "Woolf saw that she would lose the suggestiveness of Jacob's room by surrounding it with others" (*Virginia Woolf's* Jacob's Room xiv). Sue Roe adds another layer to this explanation by looking at the symbolism of Angela's character in relation to the other female characters in the novel. Pointing out her position in the scene as "a 'modern' woman, in a room of her own, preparing to make her way in the world," Roe argues that Angela "would have interfered with […] the

dynamics of male / female desire" Woolf set out to create in the novel (xxix-xxx). Without his female counterpart, Jacob, set in contrast with "the succession of desirous, powerless women he encounters in the course of his own journey towards adulthood and self-knowledge," remains the focus of the novel throughout (Roe xxix). As Roe notes, Woolf opts for a "method of shading-in," which places the women in the novel "tantalizingly and shadily almost hidden in the interstices of" a man-made world (Roe xxxi).

Kate Flint reads Woolf's revision of *Jacob's Room* in similar terms to Roe. Using G. Thomas Tanselle's distinction "between vertical and horizontal axes in the revision of texts," Flint focuses on vertical revision – that which "aims at altering the purpose, direction, or character of a work" (364). In Flint's view, vertical revision in the novel is concerned to a large extent with gender issues (364). The erasure of Angela Williams or the inclusion of Miss Hedge and the Reading Room scene are examples of such revision. In the manuscript draft, Angela Williams comes very close to embodying the potential of the modern woman but, as Kate Flint has pointed out, "[w]ithin the final structure of *Jacob's Room*, the inclusion of this section's optimism […] would have weakened the presentation of Cambridge as a bastion of male social and educational privilege" (365). In the light of the events unfolding at Cambridge at the time Woolf was writing *Jacob's Room* and of her involvement in the debate about women's intellectual abilities, her compositional decision to remove the Newnham scene from the final version of the novel is arguably linked to the novel's feminist critique.

The deleted scene takes place at night time and starts with the lyrical leitmotif of the "feathery white moon" whose light lends a dream-like quality to the description of women's quarters at Newnham (50).[16] Light pervades the scene, from Angela Williams' room – where she appears as a creature of light, "perfectly delineated" – to those of her tutors and of other young women like herself, still awake, "pouring forth into the garden this bubbling laughter"

[16] All the page numbers quoted here refer to Edward L. Bishop's *Virginia Woolf's* Jacob's Room: *The Holograph Draft.*

(50-52). For Hermione Lee, the vapour "like white mist" (52) coming out of the women's rooms "anticipates the wind blowing through the garden of 'Fernham' college, or the 'extremely complex force of femininity which will issue from the rooms where women had lived' in *A Room of One's Own*" (*Virginia Woolf* 437). The young women's laughter is a "[l]aughter of mind & body, life itself, floating […] away rules & discipline, […] immensely fertilising; yet formless, & chaotic" (52, original punctuation). Woolf's blurring of the mind - body dichotomy in her description of the Newnham female students is suggestive of a kind of learning essentially different from that of "the cloistered disciplinarian mortifying himself in solitude" criticised in "On Not Knowing Greek" (*CE*1: 9). The image recalls Jane Ellen Harrison's 1915 definition of knowledge in "Scientiæ Sacra Fames:" "knowledge is much more than any logical, mathematical proposition or series of propositions. Intellect is never wholly and separately intellectual. It is a thing charged with, dependent on, arising out of, emotional desire" (140).

A sentence slightly at odds with the pervasive lyricism of the scene formulates the significance of Angela Williams's character in economic terms, making it clear that, for the young woman, Cambridge education represented a means to gain financial independence:

> Only Angela Williams was at Newnham for the purpose of earning her living, & could not forget, even in moments of impassioned adoration the cheques of her father at Swansea – token that […] even the lily no longer floats altogether flawless upon the pool […]. (52)

The lily metaphor contrasts the reality within easy sensory grasp with what lies beneath – emotion, beauty and grace, with economic motive. The passage provides a key to Woolf's decision, suggesting that the scene would have struck a dissonant chord, making the political dimension of the contrast between Jacob and Angela too apparent.

In the published version of the novel, the young Newnham student is replaced by Miss Julia Hedge, the bitter feminist whose experience in the British Museum shows her at odds with the patriarchal tradition sanctioned by the space of the Reading Room. The British Museum episode constitutes another "scene of absence" in the novel. As in the Cambridge chapter, here, too, male privilege is figured spatially, inscribed into the very walls of the library, leaving no room for an alternative female canon:

> Her eye was caught by the final letters in Lord Macaulay's name. And she read them all round the dome – the names of great men which remind us – 'Oh damn,' said Julia Hedge, 'why didn't they leave room for an Eliot or a Brontë?' (*JR* 145)[17]

As Benjamin Harvey has documented, the scene draws on Woolf's own experience of the space as a reader's ticket holder in the first decade of the twentieth century (106). The passage also alludes to the Reading Room's redecoration in 1907, whose outcome included the inscription of "great names in English literature – from Chaucer to Browning" on "[t]he panels in the breastwork of 19 of the windows round the dome" (Harvey 107).[18] Harvey notes that the nineteen names replaced more complicated redecoration plans involving "an elaborate picture cycle" and "statues of famous authors on the twenty plinths between the windows," plans "more cheaply realized using language" (107). One might say more effectively, too, for the use of the Reading Room's walls as textual space strengthened the prescriptive force of the male canon.

Julia Hedge's sense of discomfort in the British Museum scene suggests that the Room's reinforcement of an intellectual tradition exclusive of "an Eliot or a Brontë"

[17] Benjamin Harvey links the significance of Macaulay's name with the latter's contribution to canon-making, as illustrated by his *History of England* (108). Macaulay was also "a trustee of the British Museum during the period of the Reading Room's construction" (108) and a friend of "Sir Anthony Panizzi, the museum's Principal Librarian at the time" (103). Thus, in Harvey's words, "More than any other of the nineteen names, Macaulay's suggests both the self-supporting logic of the canon of which he is part and the foreclosing of this charmed circle to – arguably more deserving – names" (108).

[18] Citation from *The Times* of 31 October 1907, the day of the Reading Room's reopening.

effectively makes her feel out of place: "When her books came she applied herself to her gigantic labours, but perceived through one of the nerves of her exasperated sensibility how composedly, unconcernedly […] the male readers applied themselves to theirs" (*JR* 145). The comparison anticipates the Reading Room scene in *A Room of One's Own*, where the discrepancy between the male student's "little grunts of satisfaction" and the narrator's puzzlement in front of a growing pile of books is explained in terms of women's lack of university education (36):

> The student who has been trained in research at Oxbridge has no doubt some method of shepherding his question past all distractions till it runs into his answer as a sheep runs into its pen. […] But if, unfortunately, one has had no training in a university, the question […] flies like a frightened flock hither and thither, helter-skelter […]. (*AROO* 36)

In the novel, a similar sense of inadequacy is expressed obliquely in Julia Hedge's realisation that "she must study statistics" (*JR* 145).

The reading of the passage above, however, needs to be complicated by the question whether the academic training which the narrator of the 1929 essay and Julia Hedge lack is desirable from Woolf's point of view. The digressive style of *A Room of One's Own* and its critique of the linear, "truth-directed" approach to learning and knowledge practised by the male academic establishment offer an indirect, but telling, answer. Woolf formulates a more explicit answer in her later work *Three Guineas*, which makes apparent "her hostility to academic hierarchies," but also acknowledges the importance of education as "the only chance for women to acquire independence and the right to earn their own living" (Barrett, "Introduction" 7). This ambivalence is suggestive of another (more nuanced perhaps) reading of the 1922 novel's omission. As shown here, the novel clearly critiques Cambridge as the embodiment of an educational system connected with the war machine and the forces

resulting in Jacob's death in the war. If so, however, the excision of the Angela Williams scene may be read not only as an indication of women's exclusion but also as a way of preserving their "outsiderness" (in the same way in which Jacob's empty room ultimately fails to "capture" Jacob).

Chapter 6

Writing Spatial History: *The Years*

The complicated composition history of *The Years* is reflected in its numerous working titles. Among these, *Other People's Houses*, recorded in Woolf's diary on 22 August 1935, suggests that part of the novel's engagement with history was expressed through its characters' relation to the spaces they inhabit.[1] Although Woolf finally opted for a time-orientated title and dates as chapter headings, her story of the Pargiters and of their progress through modernity is very much a "spatial history," featuring descriptions of rooms and houses, the configuration of different spaces and forms of living across the city, as well as the characters' increasingly freer movement between these spaces.[2] In this Woolf contradicts, to a certain extent, her own prediction, formulated several years earlier, about the form and scope of the future novel which "will tell us very little about the houses, incomes, occupations of its characters" and which "will have little kinship with the sociological novel" (*CE*2: 225). In *The Years*, more than in any of her other novels, Woolf comes closest to what may be seen as a sociological approach, drawing a variety of factual details from the extensive research that prepared her writing of the book in its various forms.[3] This is done, however, without neglecting what in the same 1927 essay she called the "monstrous, hybrid, unmanageable emotions" of the modern writer's mind, working "in this atmosphere of doubt and conflict" (*CE*2: 219).[4] This tension is present in *The Years*, hence some critics' discomfort with

[1] Woolf referred to what was to become *The Years* as *The Pargiters*, *Here and Now*, *Music*, *Dawn*, *Sons and Daughters*, *Daughters and Sons*, *Ordinary People*, *The Caravan*, *Other People's Houses* (*D*4: 6, footnote). The diary entry on 22 August 1935 reads: "It strikes me that I will call this book, Other People's Houses" (*D*4: 335).
[2] My approach is indebted to Andrew Thacker's suggestion that "texts like *The Years* (1937) and *Between the Acts* (1941) could be analysed in terms of their exploration of a form of spatial history" (184). Elizabeth F. Evans also maintains that the novel lends itself to "a spatial analysis," noting "how the narrative progresses through space as well as time and how the two are essentially connected" (112).
[3] In *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations* (2000), Anna Snaith discusses Woolf's collection of material for her novel, including data on "[w]omen and war, crime, employment, writing, education, marriage, religion, medicine, dress, law and smoking," as well as her reworking of various sources (92).
[4] "The Narrow Bridge of Art", published in *New York Herald Tribune* on 14 August 1927.

Woolf's return to what looks like a "traditional" novel. The novel's "discovery," in Woolf's words, "is the combination of the external & the internal" (*D*4: 274) aiming "to give the whole of the present society – nothing less: facts, as well as the vision" (151). Its history of rooms also draws on this tension, configuring spaces at once material and expressive of psychic interiority, which form a complexly relational geography of modernity.

Discussing Walter Sickert's influence on Woolf, Linden Peach convincingly argues that "Sickert's work […] encouraged Woolf to think of rooms in terms of their spatial identities and their material presence in people's lives" ("Re-reading Sickert's Interiors" 68). As Peach points out, Sickert's painting of interiors and his ideas about space were topical for the writing of *The Years*, which shows an awareness that "the material parameters of people's lives and their individual psychologies are peculiarly concentrated and interleaved in the spaces in which they live" (68). Elizabeth F. Evans, too, notes "[t]he interconnectedness of material environment with individual consciousness" in the novel (114). In Evans's words, "*The Years* links the politics of home and nation through its exploration of the interconnections of space, gender, and the social system" (112).

The interrelation between rooms, psychic life and the novel's writing of history is suggestively expressed in Peggy Pargiter's irritation with her aunt Eleanor's confused accessing of thoughts and memories: "Old age again, Peggy thought. Some gust blew open a door: one of the many millions in Eleanor's seventy-odd years" (*TY* 241). Eleanor herself, waking up from her doze in the middle of the party in the "Present Day" chapter of the novel, experiences momentary confusion in the same terms: "But where was she? In what room? In which of the innumerable rooms?" (*TY* 312). The image conflates the material spaces of Eleanor's life with the experiences stored in the "innumerable rooms" of the mind. Moreover, personal history opens out into collective history, as rooms come to encompass the whole of human experience in Eleanor's subsequent thoughts: "Always there were rooms; always there

were people. Always from the beginning of time…" (*TY* 312). The hybrid space of the party (in which this scene takes place) is a fitting vantage point for Eleanor's – as well as the reader's – retrospective apprehension of the family's spatial saga, from the 1880 rooms of their Victorian home to their various locations across the city.

The central idea of this chapter is that the novel charts the Pargiters' progress by means of a number of spatial shifts whose significance is bound up with issues of gender and class. Discussing Woolf's "developing urban vision," Susan M. Squier notes that the novel maps out a "shift between middle- and working-class districts of London," which is symptomatic of the female characters' movement from a patriarchal society to "a more egalitarian, feminist one created by women in their new working-class milieux" (*Virginia Woolf and London* 141). In Thomas Foster's words, "*The Years* traces not only a narrative of women's entry onto the public scene, but also the Pargiter women's 'drift' across class boundaries" (105).

This chapter examines the move from the polarised spaces of the late-Victorian period to images of networked space, recurrent in later sections of the novel. The first section looks at several private and public spaces which support the notion of a polarisation of space in the earlier chapters of the novel. The second section explores the way in which notions of class inflect representations of space and modes of living in the novel, through a focus on the figure of the servant and the spatial class divisions of the Victorian home. The final section foregrounds images of spatial networks, which underpin the description of urban movement, technological progress and the breakdown of boundaries in the last chapters of the novel. These reveal a view of space as dynamic, mobile and relational, which qualifies a reading of the novel's development in terms of a move "from categories of space that are relatively static to categories of time that are relatively mobile" (Foster 100).

Victorian Rooms

The gendered polarisation of space in the earlier sections of the novel is manifest in the various forms of demarcation between the private and public spheres, as well as in the association of women with the home. As critics have variously pointed out, the earlier chapters of *The Years* recreate the atmosphere of a late Victorian household depicted as claustrophobic for the women who inhabit it. In the 1880 chapter, the Pargiter sisters are shown inside the house in Abercorn Terrace, "cooped up" as Eleanor puts it, often looking outside from within (*TY* 23). The inside and outside circumscribe separate worlds, a separation which becomes almost complete once Crosby, the Pargiters' servant, "had drawn the curtains in both rooms" and "the windows were obscured by thick sculptured folds of claret-coloured plush" (*TY* 15). In a description echoing that of the Hilberys' drawing-room in the opening pages of *Night and Day*, the Pargiters' drawing-room turns into a space from which "[t]he world outside seemed thickly and entirely cut off" (*TY* 15). An episode that illustrates this confinement, as well as the dangers of transgression, is Rose's unchaperoned excursion to Lamley's, resulting in the encounter with male sexual threat or "street love."[5]

Women's confinement to the home is countered by men's monopoly on public spaces through access to education. As Anna Snaith shows, in the earlier versions of the novel, Woolf outspokenly addresses the issue of the disparity between boys' and girls' education, relying both on her personal experience and on factual evidence from works such as Stephen Gwynn's *The Life of Mary Kingsley* or Annabel Huth Jackson's autobiography *A Victorian Childhood* (*Virginia Woolf* 96-97). Although some of this material has not survived in the published version of the novel, in Snaith's view, "[t]he sense of the women's claustrophobia

[5] The scene and the implications of "street love," a notion which Woolf elaborates in the novel-essay version of *The Years*, have been closely examined by Susan M. Squier in *Virginia Woolf and London: The Sexual Politics of the City* (1985).

and boredom is heightened in *The Years*," an effect which, I would argue, is articulated spatially (*Virginia Woolf* 98).

The separation of the public and private spheres thematised in the opening sections of the novel is paralleled by manifestations of gender segregation within the home itself. As Victoria Rosner writes, "the well-to-do nineteenth-century British home was a highly gender-differentiated space" with clearly delineated "male and female zones," bearing specific designations and carrying out particular functions (96). Thus, "[t]he gendered divisions in the home operated on every level, from the broad 'zoning' of male and female regions […] to the contents of the rooms" (Rosner 96). Two rooms in the Pargiter household, namely Rose's sickroom and Abel's study, offer an eloquent illustration of these divisions. Although the novel does not juxtapose the two rooms explicitly, the associations conveyed by the two spaces legitimise this opposition. Given the fortuitous nature of illness, the sickroom does not represent a *type* of room in the same way that the study does. Nevertheless, its significance as a powerful locus in Victorian representations of invalidism strongly associated with femininity – as detailed below – plays an important part in Woolf's spatial critique of late-Victorian domesticity in *The Years*.

The presence of the dying wife and mother, Rose Pargiter, heightens the sense of confinement and tension manifest in the Pargiters' household at the beginning of the novel. Although, in some ways, marginal because cut off from the life going on inside the house, symbolically Rose's sickroom lies at the centre of the house and its residents' preoccupations, as a space at the same time dreaded and revered, a kind of "borderland between life and death," whose stasis stands for a more symbolic form of paralysis within the household (*TY* 16). Read in conjunction with Rose Pargiter's portrait, one of the several "solid objects" circulating in the novel, the sickroom invites questions about woman's status inside the

private sphere and the Victorian legacy with which the Pargiter women have to come to terms, each in her own way.

As Maria H. Frawley has argued, although the abundant sickroom literature of the nineteenth century has both male and female protagonists, "[i]n a range of ways, the nineteenth-century sickroom itself was gendered as feminine" (8). Both Frawley and Miriam Bailin show that the experience of confinement entailed by the sickroom tied into the ideology of separate spheres. Thus, "most middle-class women in the nineteenth-century would not have associated being bedridden and confined to home as compromising their femininity," whereas for men the same experience proved more problematic in that it raised questions as to their masculinity (Frawley 7-8). For some male sufferers, invalidism was a form of "compliance and acquiescence, a debilitating posture of submission inextricably bound to the feminine" (Frawley 157). If some male invalids found the idea of "a less prescriptive assignment of gender attributes" appealing, this "longing […] could only be represented […] as a form of violence against the self" (Bailin 40). Another way in which the sickroom was bound up with the feminine was through its appeal to "female nurturance," "the care of the sick being one of the primary duties and supposedly instinctive capacities of the angel in the house" (Bailin 11).

Woolf's mother, Julia Stephen, championed such duties and is known to have devoted herself to charity work to the point of exhaustion. Her *Notes from Sick Rooms*, a text published in 1883, points out the attention required from nurses by a wide range of details related to the invalid's condition and susceptibilities, such as "'the torment of crumbs' in an invalid's bed, the sensitivity of an invalid's skin after washing [or] what kind of comb works best for an invalid's hair" (Frawley 181). Unfortunately, like other carers, Julia Stephen was also to become familiar with the experience of being cared for.[6] As the autobiographical

[6] In her study of Victorian literature, Miriam Bailin instances several fictional examples of how the heroine "having exhausted herself in the service of others, becomes a patient in turn, thus assuring her return to the

pieces collected in *Moments of Being* indicate, the maternal sickroom was an important memory for Woolf who, as a child, had to face the traumatic event of her mother's death in the latter's bedroom at 22 Hyde Park Gate. The memories recorded in "A Sketch of the Past" vividly recreate the atmosphere of the sickroom:

> I think candles were burning; and I think the sun was coming in. At any rate I remember the long-looking glass; with the drawers on either side; and the washstand; and the great bed on which my mother lay. (*MB* 91-92)[7]

In *The Years*, the first perspectives on the sickroom are external, conveyed through brief references by the Pargiter children, as when they need to decide "who's going to take up the tray" (9). Vaguely located "upstairs," it is first described via Rose the daughter's olfactory sensations: passing her mother's bedroom, the girl "paused […] and snuffed the sour-sweet smell that seemed to hang about the jugs, the tumblers, the covered bowls on the table outside the door" (*TY* 13). Delia's reaction in front of the same door several pages later mirrors this scene: "When she came to the bedroom door […] she paused. The sour-sweet smell of illness slightly sickened her" (*TY* 15). In *Flush*, Woolf attributes similar olfactory sensations to her non-human protagonist, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spaniel, whose discovery of his mistress's sickroom is first carried out by means of his acute sense of smell:

> […] it was the smell of the room that overpowered him. Only a scholar who has descended step by step into a mausoleum and there finds himself in a crypt, crusted with fungus, slimy with mould, exuding sour smells of decay and antiquity […] – only the sensations of such an explorer into the buried vaults of a ruined city can compare with the riot of emotions that flooded Flush's nerves as

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dependency and incapacity that mark her as female and initiating her return to private life and familial obligation" (29).

[7] Rose Pargiter's bedroom borrows from Woolf's memory of her mother's sickroom the "long narrow glass […] dazzled at the moment with red light" (*TY* 16).

> he stood for the first time in an invalid's bedroom, in Wimpole Street, and smelt eau-de-Cologne. (*F* 16)

The imagery used in the passage, more particularly the emphasis on decay and the equation of the sickroom with a crypt, configure a space where the invalid is buried alive, suggestive of the room's function "as a metonymy of the secluded life of its occupant and a metaphor of the stifling forces of Victorian society" (Reynier 189). Flush's mistress is a prisoner to the house as much as to the patriarchal ideologies which sanction the "literally invalidating and deadening authority of the father" (Reynier 190). The critique at work in this passage is also operative in Woolf's writing of the sickroom in *The Years*.

In the 1937 novel, the aestheticized, picture-like interior of the sickroom is all the more claustrophobic in its "unreal cleanliness, quiet and order," juxtaposed to Rose Pargiter's body, "soft, decayed but everlasting, lying in the cleft of the pillows, an obstacle, a prevention, an impediment to all life" (*TY* 16). The mother's body symbolises the threat posed to the younger Pargiter women by the tradition of the "angel in the house," intolerant of any form of transgression. Delia's fantasy of giving a speech in the presence of Charles Stewart Parnell in her mother's sickroom symbolises precisely a transgressive desire at odds with a space evocative of marriage as "the only proper arena for women's emotional and sexual expression" (Gottlieb 224). The dream of supporting Parnell's cause with its "emphasis on freedom and revolution […] fits with Delia's frustration and need for change" (Snaith, *Virginia Woolf* 98-99).

Delia's ambivalence throughout the 1880 chapter of the novel points to wider implications behind the Victorian mother's illness. If, as Linden Peach writes, "the large house [in Abercorn Terrace] is analogous to the family as a social institution," Rose Pargiter's sickroom materialises the effects on women of the institutionalised pressures of the domestic sphere ("Private and Public Spaces" 172). The causes of the mother's illness are not explicitly

stated in the novel, but repeated childbearing and the strain of catering for the needs of a numerous household are likely to have contributed to her condition.[8] Although "overwork" was a condition categorised as predominantly male and therefore linked with exertion in the public sphere, women both outside and inside the private sphere were equally liable to suffer from it (Frawley 47-48). As Miriam Bailin has demonstrated, against the notions underpinning the ideology of separate spheres, women enjoyed little privacy inside the home, the latter being "in fact, something of a public thoroughfare requiring constant attendance upon visitors and family" (20). Paradoxically, "[t]he sickroom was often the only available room of one's own" (Bailin 20).

In the novel, this paradox complicates the relationship between the invalid and the objects in the sickroom, raising the question whether those objects reflect personal tastes and beliefs, or values imposed from the outside. In this light, the "prayer-book and a vase of lilies of the valley" present on Rose Pargiter's bedside table, alongside the crucifix which triggers Delia's violent outburst, may be only an indication of compliance with a system of values advocating resignation and self-sacrifice (*TY* 16). The prayer-book, in particular, an illustration of the nineteenth-century profuseness in "spiritual texts devoted to the enrichment of the Christian invalid's character" (Frawley 158), associates Rose Pargiter to "the Christian brand" of invalidism (189). The latter had for effect "to deprive the sufferer of agency, the capacity to invoke will, exert power, take action" (Frawley 189). Delia's expostulation – "'But you don't believe in it!' […] 'You don't want to die" – can be read as an indication that these objects may not reflect the mother's intimate beliefs (*TY* 16).

Despite its relative isolation, the sickroom maintains its ties with "the social processes and expectations from which its own customs and rules of association and conduct deviate" (Bailin 20). Thus, Rose's preoccupations in her moments of wakefulness reveal her anxiety as

[8] In *The Pargiters*, the mother's illness is identified as "Brights [sic] disease," a detail which is left out in the published version of the novel (23).

to the good functioning of the household. Looking at the dressing-table on which "[s]ome gleam from the lamp outside made the white cloth look extremely white," she is distressingly led to think of "the washing bill": "The expense, Delia, the expense – that's what worries me" (*TY* 18). Similarly, by Milly's account, even on her sickbed, the invalid voices concerns about the servants' misconduct: "She can see Nurse stealing the sugar, she says. She can see her shadow on the wall" (*TY* 22). The text does not make it clear whether Rose Pargiter's incriminations are founded or whether Nurse's dishonesty is only a figment of her imagination. Nevertheless, these incriminations are typical of her class and former status of household manager, for whom "setting tests for their [the servants'] honesty" and ruthlessly controlling any fraud on their part were a common practice, which continued well into the twentieth-century (Light 182). Rose Pargiter's worries about Nurse's cheating call into question the Victorian discourses on "the true nature of home" as "the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division" in which the woman reigns serene and free from "the anxieties of the outer life" (Ruskin 59). Far from confirming the idea of the private sphere as separate from socio-economic concerns, these worries uncover, in Foucauldian terms, a site of relations of power within the Victorian household, an idea developed in the next section.

Bedridden, Rose Pargiter is present in her family's drawing-room in the guise of a portrait, one of the several objects whose circulation is recorded at different times in the novel. The painting portrays a much younger self, a "white-robed girl with the flower-basket" in stark contrast with the sitter's present condition of a dying woman (*TY* 27). Hung over the mantelpiece, it triggers various reactions from the family members, from Milly's discreet tears to Delia's anger, for whom the girl in the painting is a malicious reminder of the ever-lasting agony of the woman in the sickroom:

> So you're not going to die, she said, looking at the girl balanced on the trunk of a tree; she seemed to simper down at her daughter with smiling malice. You're not going to die – never, never! she cried clenching her hands together beneath her mother's picture. (*TY* 28)

The passage echoes the image of matricide in the essay / lecture "Professions for Women" from which the novel emerged. For Delia, more than for the other Pargiter sisters, the dying mother seems to embody the weighty Victorian legacy whose unwritten rules made women prisoners of the house. The painting lends materiality to this legacy, mocking any potential for change in its portrayal of eternal youth. The conjunction between the portrait and Rose Pargiter's prolonged suffering in the sickroom exemplifies what Maria H. Frawley sees as a central function of the nineteenth-century invalid, namely that of "tapp[ing] into and express[ing] deep-seated societal doubts […] about progress and mobility, both master narratives of nineteenth-century culture" (5). In *The Pargiters*, this association is also expressed through Eleanor. In a section of the drawing-room dialogue between Eleanor and Milly omitted from the equivalent scene in *The Years*, Eleanor is led to speculate on what she would do if she had financial freedom:

> 'I shouldn't live like this, said Eleanor, looking round the room – {& glancing, quickly, at the oil portrait of her mother – when she was young, that hung over the [*fireplace,*] mantelpiece.}
>
> '[*I think*] I should take a room, somewhere [*in quite*] <but in> a poor neighbourhood: & [*& then*] I [*should get to know the people*]; & [*then*] I['d] pull down all these awful [*little*] slums & - well, start things fresh, [*in a better system.*] – if I had the money.' (*P* 23)

As the passage indicates, Eleanor, like Delia, longs to evade the model of domesticity embodied by Abercorn Terrace and associated with her mother's portrait. Moreover, this

longing is accompanied by the egalitarian wish to provide better housing for the working-classes, an endeavour to which Eleanor applies herself in *The Years*. Unlike in the published version of the novel, in this earlier draft, Eleanor's attitude to the portrait bears no sentimentality: she thinks it "a silly simpering picture," in which the artist's idealisation of her mother's face had resulted in an expression "smoothed & refined into insipidity" (*P* 23).

Inevitably outliving its model, the portrait continues to enjoy a life of its own, re-emerging for brief moments in the narrative. At one time, Martin finds it in its old place, presiding over the mantelpiece in the Pargiters' drawing-room, unchanged but for an accumulation of dirt which had covered what "used to be a flower in the grass" (*TY* 109). More importantly, however, for Martin, "[i]n the course of the past few years it had ceased to be his mother; it had become a work of art" (*TY* 109). The same idea is echoed years later by Peggy on looking at "the picture of her grandmother" in old Eleanor's flat (*TY* 239). Like Martin, Peggy concludes that "she had assumed the immunity of a work of art; she seemed as she sat there, smiling at her roses, to be indifferent to our right and wrong" (*TY* 239). Peggy's reading of the painting parallels the detachment with which she captures Eleanor's idiosyncrasies in a mental "portrait of a Victorian spinster" (*TY* 244). The laying to rest of the mother figure and its legacy, resulting in the possibility of a new life for the – newly cleaned – portrait, testifies to the "process of resistance, exorcizement, transformation, and a new levelling relationship" characteristic of Woolf's own coming to terms with her Victorian legacy (Beer, *Virginia Woolf* 93).

Abel Pargiter's study, which features in the 1891 chapter of the novel, expresses a set of values clearly at odds with those attached to the sickroom. Whilst the latter connotes powerlessness, dependence and liability to intrusion, the study is a statement of its occupant's authority, privacy and autonomy. Relatively brief, the scene set in Abel's study – in which Eleanor submits the household accounts to her father's inspection in order to be given money

– is nevertheless significant in its suggestion of the gender segregation of the home. As Victoria Rosner has documented, the study was expressive of a masculinity that was "autonomous, knowledge-based, and resistant to both physical and psychological penetration" (95). As such, it occupied a privileged position in the Victorian home, allowing both easy "access to the household community" (Rosner 97) as well as "a heightened degree of autonomy within the symbiotic structure of the household" (93). Moreover, "the study often served as a center for the governance of the household," a function confirmed, in the novel, by the purpose of Eleanor's visit (Rosner 97). The "deliberate way in which he [Abel] unlocked the drawer in which he kept the cheque-book," interpreted by Eleanor as a sign of old age, also suggests unequal power relations between father and daughter, despite the latter's thought that "they were almost like brother and sister" (*TY* 67). In the "Second Essay" of *The Pargiters*, the father's "position of great power and responsibility" is explicitly linked with his financial control over the household: "The money belonged entirely to him" (31). This status allows Abel, "being accustomed to command as he was, [to] enjoy the exercise of power" as well as "to be a little secretive about the exact amount of his income" (*P* 31-32).

Eleanor's curiosity as to her father's activities in the study places further emphasis on the secrecy surrounding Abel's privileged position: "Would he sit there all morning reading the financial papers and considering his investments, she wondered?" (*TY* 67). These activities, like the room's interior itself, suit the masculine nature of the study: from Eleanor's perspective, "[i]t looked like an office, with its files of papers and its deed-boxes, except that horses' bits hung by the fireplace, and there was the silver cup he had won at polo" (*TY* 67). The files of paper evoke another function of the room, adjacent to that of securing male privacy: "[t]he study was the place where private family documents would most likely be kept" (Rosner 104). Alongside these documents, papers of a more illicit nature would find appropriate shelter. In Rosner's words, "the room seems to have long been a place for keeping

secrets, especially those related to sexual transgression" (94). Abel's study fulfils this function by sheltering the proof of his love-affair with Mira, a secret retrospectively discovered by the family: "His father had died – after his death they had found letters from a woman called Mira tied up in his table drawer" (*TY* 163). As the scene showing Abel's visit to Eugénie and Digby's reveals, this secret weighs on Abel who, on leaving Eugénie, is "depressed and disappointed" about not being able to speak to his sister-in-law, but also resigned: "Perhaps he never would tell anybody anything. After all […] it was his own affair […]. One must burn one's own smoke" (*TY* 93). This passage overshadows Abel's privilege of secrecy and suggests that the "abominable system" – as Martin later perceives it – represented by Abercorn Terrace, with its emphasis on outward decorum and its lack of genuine communication, imposed equal restraint on the male, as on the female, members of the family (*TY* 163).

Abel Pargiter's club, which features in the opening pages of the novel, represents the public counterpart to the study in that it reaffirms similar male privileges in the public sphere. The club not only sanctions, but also reinforces these privileges by linking male authority to involvement in politics and public affairs. A retired colonel, Abel Pargiter is "one of those upper-middle-class men who spent their early manhood protecting, administering, defending the outposts of the British Empire" (J. Johnson 322). Appropriately, his fellow club members are "men of his own type, men who had been soldiers, civil servants" and who are now "reviving with old jokes and stories […] their past in India, Africa, Egypt" (*TY* 4). A male space at the heart of Empire, the club also allows for secrecy, this time the shared political secrecy as to "some possible appointment," which forces "the three baldish and greyish heads […] close together for a few minutes" (*TY* 4). The tone is ironic as the scene, written in the 1930s, "looks back on Empire through a post-Empire lens" (Peach, "No Longer a View" 202). Tellingly, despite his gaze reminiscent of "the glare of the East" and its "dust," Abel

feels “out of it all” (*TY* 4). This feeling is reflected by his attitude of vague expectancy, in which the cigar “suspended in his hand cryptically suggests not only the suspended nature of his life but of his class in the wake of the demise of the British Empire” (Peach, “No Longer a View” 202). In spite of the contained irony, the club functions effectively as an indicator of the male characters’ involvement in the country’s politics while “the women characters are relegated exclusively to the private house or to those public functions which operate *outside* society’s institutions” (Gottlieb 217).

One explanation for men’s monopoly on the public sphere lies in their access to education, which, as stated earlier, Woolf explores more thoroughly in the earlier drafts than in the published version of the novel. This is explicit in the comparison between Edward’s college education and his sisters’ life at home, as well as the contrast between Edward and Kitty’s Oxford experience, both of which reiterate in fictional form Woolf’s ideas on women and education. As in *Jacob’s Room*, Edward’s Oxford rooms epitomise male privilege, handed down from father to son, as the anecdote about Abel Pargiter’s bursting into a student’s room suggests: “‘My father had these rooms, sir,’ the Colonel had said, by way of apology” (*TY* 36). In *The Pargiters*, Abel’s proprietorial intrusion parallels his son’s satisfaction with his “lovely <early> Eighteenth Century room,” whose restrained panelled beauty reinforces the appeal of Oxford as a potential long-term residence: “if he got a Fellowship then he would stay at Oxford forever. Nothing in the whole world seemed to him so desirable. He […] lay back in his chair & looked round his room as he sipped his coffee” (*P* 59). The passage suggestively links spatial autonomy to the preservation of male intellect, an idea expressed early in the novel in young Rose’s intruding on Martin studying.

The Oxford scene recalls the Cambridge episode in *Jacob’s Room* and its emphasis on male bonding, conveyed through veiled allusions to homosexuality. Edward, likened to “a Greek boy on a frieze,” is presented as the object of Gibbs and Ashley’s admiration (*TY* 36).

Ashley, in particular, displays the symptoms of a jealous lover, seeing Edward "like a Greek boy; strong; yet in some way, weak, needing his protection," which for Ashley meant "[h]e ought to be rescued from brutes like Gibbs" (*TY* 39). However, the scene suppresses the homosexual overtones of the rivalry by recasting the contest initiated over Edward in competitive terms. The more detailed description of Edward's room in *The Pargiters* emphasises the importance of this spirit of competition. Alongside books "bought almost as much for the subdued ripple of brown & gold that their backs made as for their contents," the latter exhibits fifteen "silver cups on [the] mantelpiece," evidence of Edward's athletic talents (*P* 59-60). Nevertheless, as the young man understands, "[p]rizes & cups were only the outer symbol of something much more important. It was the spirit behind these <silver> cups […] that counted" (*P* 61). Abel's gift of port to his son and the remark that "[y]ou can't drive a bayonet through a chap's body in cold blood" effectively links competitive spirit to warfare and violence (*TY* 37).

The novel explores the contrast between the glorification of male intellect and women's marginalisation through the character of Kitty Malone, who, despite being the daughter of the college's Master, remains, in effect, an outsider. As Anna Snaith points out, in the earlier drafts of the novel, Woolf investigates at length "not only Kitty's discontent but also the question of male reactions to women and education" (*Virginia Woolf* 101). In the published version, the more polemical passages are lost, but the remaining sections are enough to convey Kitty's liminal position at Oxford. Often engaged in guest reception rituals at the Lodge, Kitty benefits by way of intellectual training only from the history lessons given by Miss Craddock, a marginalised academic living in "the cheap red villas that her [Kitty's] father disliked so much" (*TY* 46). It is clear that, despite Kitty's "original mind," as Miss Craddock sees it, her parents view her education as a mere accessory to the more worthwhile pursuit of making an advantageous marriage. The scene showing the Fripps' visit to the

Lodge alludes to Kitty's status at Oxford through a suggestive image of exclusion. On opening the window of her room at the end of a day punctuated by duties – "sights in the morning; people for lunch; undergraduates for tea; and a dinner-party in the evening" – Kitty wonders about the "roar of laughter […] from the undergraduates' quarters:" "What are they laughing at […]? It sounded as if they were enjoying themselves" (*TY* 44-5). The physical proximity suggested by the sound reaching Kitty's room underscores her lack of access to the male undergraduates' experience of college life.

In the opening of the 1891 section, Kitty appears as Lady Lasswade, "sitting on the terrace beside her husband and his spaniel," which suggests that the imperative of a safe choice has prevailed over her more romantic and unconventional impulses, recorded in the previous chapter (*TY* 65).[9] On the whole, as a character, she "fades into the background" (Radin 35). Commenting on the prominent place occupied by Kitty in the 1880 chapter, Grace Radin speculates that Woolf "may have intended her to play a larger role in the novel, possibly as a counterpoint to Eleanor," a juxtaposition which would "have provided an opportunity to contrast the position of women in different class and social roles" (36). If this was Woolf's initial intention, despite the shift of focus in her treatment of Kitty, the novel nonetheless supplied her with alternative ways of investigating class and social roles.

Mobilities: A "Creature of Sunshine"

Woolf's announcement of a fundamental change in human character dated "on or about December 1910" is well known. Although the novel does not frame it as a moment of rupture, the change thematised in *The Years* recalls Woolf's 1923 formulation in the way that it infiltrates the multilayered social relations and modes of living in the novel. The attention to the spaces that the characters inhabit, as well as the social inequalities encoded in those spaces, testifies to "the focus in *The Years* on the extent to which space represents and is

[9] Her admiration of the Robsons is one example.

structured by discourses that determine social relations" (Peach, "Private and Public Spaces" 181). The novel initially displays a "dialectic" geography particularly suited to express "tensions, contradictions and complexities […] denied by conventional social topographies" (Peach, "Private and Public Spaces" 180). This is explicitly shown in the novel through the character of Eleanor, who, due to her work in providing housing for the poor, is the best placed to perceive the contrast between "Canning Place; Abercorn Terrace; this room; that room" (*TY* 23). Eleanor's "Grove day" mood and the difficulty of keeping in check the "many different things […] going on in her head" after her visit to Mrs Levy's in a poor quarter of London suggest her uneasiness about the different social realities circumscribed by her home and the places with which she has become acquainted through her philanthropic work (*TY* 23).

The committee to which Eleanor is bound in the 1891 chapter of *The Years* and her undertaking of building cottages for the poor recall Stella Duckworth's 1897 project, in collaboration with Octavia Hill and Stella's cousin Edmund Fisher, an architect (J. Johnson 331-332).[10] In her early journals, Woolf recalls participating in some of the meetings about "Stellas [sic] new cottages" (*PA* 21).[11] Eleanor's "Rigby Cottages," named after her mother, prove a concern because of Duffus' poor work, as a result of which "she never got a penny interest: it all went on repairs" (*TY* 76). The confrontation with Duffus – in which Eleanor adopts "the upper-middle-class tone that she detested" (*TY* 73) – and the reference to the cottages being unprofitable highlight her uneasy position within "the tradition of Victorian philanthropy, that special province of middle-class women" (Zwerdling 99). Eleanor's uneasiness about having to deal with Duffus in "the tone of the Colonel's daughter" (*TY* 73)

[10] In Hermione Lee's words, Octavia Hill was "the pioneering Victorian woman activist for housing reform and better living conditions for the London poor" (*Virginia Woolf* 122).

[11] In the diary entry of Monday 25 January 1897, in a voice characteristic of her young age, she records how, during one of these meetings, Stella, Hill and Fisher "learnedly argued over them [Stella's plans] for half an hour" while she was "sitting on a stool by the fire and surveying Miss Hills [sic] legs" (*PA* 21).

reflects both Woolf's ambivalence about female philanthropy and social activism as well as "her middle-class guilt" (Zwerdling 98).

As Alex Zwerdling has shown, by the turn of the twentieth century, "[t]he influence of Marx and Engels and of other socialist and egalitarian thinkers undermined the foundations of private philanthropy," questioning individual charity as a way of "merely mask[ing] the fundamental injustice of the system" (100-101). The history of social housing in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth reflects these transformations. Robert Whelan notes that, from being "one of the most active branches of Victorian philanthropy" (11), social housing gradually became the preserve of the state sector in the latter part of the nineteenth century, a development that Octavia Hill had warned against (17-20).[12]

Eleanor's movement across London in the opening sections of the novel, justified by her work in social housing, reveals the heterogeneous, class-inflected geography of the city.[13] On leaving behind "the residential quarter," Eleanor notices how "the houses were changing; […] turning into shops" and that "[t]he streets were becoming poorer and poorer" (*TY* 69). Although she feels that "[t]his was her world; here she was in her element," her meeting with Duffus forces her back into the class mindset which she strives to transcend (*TY* 69). A stranger summing her up on the bus that takes her back to Abercorn Terrace provides a cold, cynical perspective on her charitable pursuits: "a well-known type; with a bag; philanthropic; well nourished; a spinster; a virgin; like all the women of her class, cold" (*TY* 74). The sarcastic objectivisation effected through this critical reading of Eleanor suggests that, despite

[12]According to Robert Whelan, Octavia Hill's work, celebrated and recognised during her lifetime for its scope and achievements, has come under the attack of modern (often left-wing) commentators who see the end of landlordism as a positive development and criticise Hill for her rejection of "any form of subsidy or state provision to the end of her life" (35) as well as for the implicit moral injunction underlying her work, namely that of "bettering the poor" (36).

[13] In the 1891 section of the novel, Eleanor enjoys the feeling that "[s]he, too, was going to her work […]. After the Committee, Duffus; after Duffus, Dickson," although hers is philanthropic, rather than professional, work (*TY* 69).

her good intentions, her outlook is likely to remain class-bound, partly due to her lack of education and other experiences outside the home except for her philanthropic work.

An element that supports this idea is Eleanor's initial blindness to the class segregation at work within her parents' household, revealed in the episode relating her separation from Crosby, the Pargiters' long-term live-in servant. Woolf's treatment of the figure of the servant in *The Years* confirms, to a certain extent, what Alex Zwerdling terms the "impressionist erasure of detail […] characteristic of Woolf's depiction of lower-class life" (97). At the same time, however, that lack is counterbalanced by her thematisation of the middle-class emerging awareness of, and uneasiness about, the socio-economic implications of domestic service, uneasiness which was also Woolf's own. Affiliating Woolf to a literary tradition "based on the assumption that the literary imagination need not sink below the level of the impoverished governess," Zwerdling admits that "she is distinctly uneasy about the limits of her knowledge" (97). Alison Light's recent study *Mrs Woolf and the Servants* scrupulously uncovers Woolf's class prejudices as well as her uneasiness about servant work – which did not prevent her from relying on it to the end of her life – but also documents the odd, albeit fleeting and subsequently obliterated, attempt "to identify with the woman at the bottom of the pile" (xix).[14]

According to Alex Zwerdling, Woolf and her generation no longer had the "sense of legitimacy" and "the hierarchical confidence" expressed by the generation of her parents, who could maintain "that there was nothing degrading in domestic service" (98). An anecdote recorded in the autobiographical piece "A Sketch of the Past" provides a telling example. When one of the maids working for the Stephens dared to complain about the living conditions in the basement, Julia "at once assumed the frozen dignity of the Victorian matron; and said […]: 'Leave the room'; she (unfortunate girl) vanished behind the red plush curtain"

[14]Light refers to the sketch "The Ladies Lavatory," among the last of Woolf's texts, written in 1941, which initially featured as the "central intelligence" a lavatory attendant subsequently deleted, an erasure which Light sees as typical of Woolf (xix).

(*MB* 116-117). The basement, described in the same text as "a dark insanitary place for seven maids to live in," constitutes an important trope in *The Years*, where it serves to express the class-inflected spatial divisions of the Victorian home, as well as the changes affecting domestic service at the turn of the century (*MB* 116).

The transition from the Victorian to the Edwardian / Georgian eras in the novel is shown to affect master–servant relations, in ways reminiscent of Woolf's proclamation of a shift in human relations "on or about December 1910" in "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (*CE*1: 320). The "homely illustration" used to highlight the contrast between the Victorian and the Georgian cooks foregrounds the spatial shift involved:

> The Victorian cook lived like a leviathan in the lower depths, formidable, silent, obscure, inscrutable; the Georgian cook is a creature of sunshine and fresh air; in and out of the drawing-room, now to borrow the *Daily Herald*, now to ask advice about a hat. (*CE*1: 320)

Despite the light tone, the passage bears factual relevance. The "lower depths," the Victorian cook's territory, evoke the spatial configuration of (upper-)middle-class households dependent on the work of live-in servants. According to this configuration, the latter, in their vast majority women, were "[r]elegated to the basements and the attics, using separate entrances and staircases, […] segregated in separate wings and outbuildings" (Light 1). The Georgian cook's conspicuous presence in the space of the drawing-room, for reasons other than those related to service, touched on the question of the visibility of servants and domestic labour. As Alison Light argues, servants were meant to be efficient but self-effacing, ideally invisible as individuals, despite being "always a visible sign of their employer's status" (1). In *The Years*, Eleanor associates the "highly respectable" aspect of the houses in Abercorn Terrace with domestic labour (74). On coming back from her meeting with Duffus, "in every front room she seemed to see a parlourmaid's arm sweep over the table, laying it for

luncheon" (*TY* 74). Although the "parlourmaid's arm" may be read as an indication of Eleanor's restricted view inside other people's houses, the synecdoche through which the servant's body is reduced to a disembodied arm efficiently carrying out the task of setting the table is suggestive of the servants' double status.

The shift configured in *The Years* goes beyond the servant's growing visibility in the drawing-room; Woolf records the disappearance of live-in domestic service from the middle-class household. This is conveyed through Crosby, who, when the Pargiters' house is put up for sale in the 1913 chapter, has to give up her long-term home in the basement of the house and move to Richmond, so that "[b]y the '1917' section of the novel, resident servants have disappeared" (Light 251). Historically this was not the case; in the 1930s, "[s]ervice was still the biggest employer of Britain's women but it was becoming the least desired occupation and residential service was the least preferable option" (Light 227). Nevertheless, Woolf is accurate in her portrayal of unsettling times for domestic service in the first decades of the twentieth century, noticeable in the servants' increasing mobility and awareness of their own status and rights (Light 250-1).[15]

In the novel, this shift has various implications. For Eleanor, her father's death and the selling of the house, hence the separation from Crosby, mark the beginning of an exciting new life on her own, which allows her to relinquish the role of "housekeeper" inherited from her mother: "It was a dreadful moment; unhappy; muddled; altogether wrong. Crosby was so miserable; she was so glad" (*TY* 159).[16] Years later, she lives "alone in a sort of workman's flat at the top of six flights of stairs" and has travelled to different parts of the world (*TY* 242). In the 1917 chapter, Maggie and Renny display a feeling of bohemian pride in their self-

[15] However, as Alison Light notes, Woolf "avoids representing contemporary servants" (251), opting for a sentimentalised portrayal of Crosby as "a figure of pathos" (71).

[16] This is the term used by Abel Pargiter to address his daughter in the 1891 chapter of the novel, when the latter comes into the study to discuss the household accounts (*TY* 67). The 1911 chapter finds Eleanor freed of her ties to Abercorn Terrace following her father's death, deliberating: "Should she take another house? Should she travel? Should she go to India, at last?" (TY 156). Her decision – "No, […] not another house" (TY 156) – shows that she is "linking the materiality of a house with the constraint of domesticity" (Evans 114).

reliance, expressed in terms of being dirty, living "[i]n rags" and "din[ing] in the basement […] because we've no servants" (*TY* 206-7).

As in Maggie's explanation above, the basement is associated with the figure of the servant throughout the novel and it systematically evokes the spatial divisions of the (upper-) middle-class home. The first reference to the basement as the site of domestic labour features in the first scene of the novel, in the form of a vignette: "In the basements of the long avenues of the residential quarters servant girls in cap and apron prepared tea" (*TY* 3). Brief, the vignette is nevertheless suggestive in its depiction of adequately clothed young women labouring for the well-being of "virgins and spinsters with hands that had staunched the sores of Bermondsey and Hoxton" (*TY* 3). Despite the allusion to the latter's involvement in "charitable work in […] poorer districts of London […] where living conditions were among the worst in Britain," the tone is ironic and the contrast between the "servant girls in cap and apron" and their mistresses, clearly favourable to the former (J. Johnson 321).

A more significant reference to the basement occurs in the separation scene in which Eleanor attempts to comfort a tearful Crosby:

> 'I should think you'd be glad to be out of that basement anyhow, Crosby,' said Eleanor […]. She had never realized how dark, how low it was, until, looking at it with 'our Mr Grice', she had felt ashamed. (*TY* 158)

Suddenly objectified through the eyes of the estate agent, the basement appears to Eleanor in its stark reality as inappropriate for living, hence the irony of Crosby's earnest answer: "It was my home for forty years, Miss" (*TY* 159). For Crosby, the basement really was "home" inasmuch as the employers' house could become home for live-in servants: "a home within a home, a halfway house between kin and strangers" (Light 2). In the scene, the servant's reply has no incriminatory overtones and appears to be merely motivated by a sense of loss and nostalgia for a bygone era, to be rendered irrevocable by the selling of the house. A less

sentimental attitude towards the basement is depicted in an earlier scene, in which "Matty Stiles, the caretaker, *huddled* in the basement of the house in Browne Street" points out its dampness to potential buyers in order to chill their interest and be able to remain in her job a while longer (*TY* 107, emphasis added). The caretaker has no links with the previous owners, Eugénie and Digby Pargiter, both dead, and the basement represents a necessary evil, a make-do work and living place, preferable to "lodg[ing] with her son in Pimlico" (*TY* 108). Against the caretaker's hopes, the house finds a buyer, so that when Martin Pargiter comes to visit, the woman no longer takes the trouble to answer the door: "Let him ring the house down for all she cared" (*TY* 108). The scene is suggestive in the way it stages the caretaker's and Martin's gaze spatially, emphasising the social distance between the two characters. On Martin's ringing the bell, Matty Stiles "could see his legs there, standing on the door-step, between the canaries' cage and the dirty linen which she had been going to wash" (*TY* 108). Martin, in his turn, noticed "[a] woman […] peering up at him from behind the bars of a cage in the basement" (*TY* 108). The caretaker's aching shoulder (very likely intensified by the dampness of the basement) indirectly justifies her mild act of insurgence.

The basement also features obliquely in the final scene of the novel. In this scene, two children, whom Eleanor assumes to be the caretaker's children and "perhaps […] frightened, because she had brought them up from the basement into the drawing-room," emerge into the room during Delia's party and are coaxed into singing a song (*TY* 313). The song, despite being "fiercely" delivered, proves inexplicably unintelligible for the audience (*TY* 314). Thomas Foster reads this scene as an indication that "the Pargiter household remains a space of reproduction, but what is reproduced is difference rather than sameness" (114). Since the children do not belong to the Pargiter household properly speaking, a class-oriented interpretation such as Alison Light's seems more appropriate. For Light, the children's song

stands for the idiolect of the lower classes, its incomprehensibility suggesting "the failure of communication not only between classes but within them" (249).

In an earlier episode, the difficulty of genuine communication between classes is voiced by Martin following a conversation with Crosby. The latter, although no longer a servant for the family, continues to do work for Martin, her favourite among the Pargiter children. Martin, however, sees talking to Crosby as an imposition: "He hated talking to servants; it always made him feel insincere" (*TY* 162). The same notion of insincerity and deceit underlies his critique of the model of domesticity represented by Abercorn Terrace:

> It was an abominable system, he thought; family life; Abercorn Terrace. No wonder the house would not let. It had one bathroom and a basement; and there all those different people had lived, boxed up together telling lies. (*TY* 163)

Crosby, on the other hand, judges Richmond "very low compared to Abercorn Terrace," displaying a form of servant snobbery fashioned by her long years of service in the Pargiter household (*TY* 162). At the end of the 1913 chapter, she occupies a "little room" in a "little house off the Green," with a former butler as a neighbour, an allusion to other forms of domestic service becoming obsolete, like Crosby's (*TY* 159-60). Significantly, "when she had unpacked her things," the room "had a look of Abercorn Terrace" (*TY* 160). The transposition of objects – some of which had belonged to her employers – from Abercorn Terrace to the room in Richmond can be read as a confirmation that Crosby is a sentimentalized version of the Victorian servant, as suggested by Alison Light (71). Thus, her decorating her Richmond room so as to recreate the feel of Abercorn Terrace would signify the subconscious acknowledgement of psychological dependence on her former employers. On the other hand, it may also stand for a form of timid appropriation of "the solid objects that Crosby dusted and polished every day" in her long years of service (*TY* 25-26). The implication of changing

socio-economic relations that the trajectory of these objects imparts participates in the novel's narrative of movement, change and the dynamic reconfiguration of space.

Networks: "Pipes, Wires, Drains"

The thought that "[u]nderneath were pipes, wires, drains" surfaces in Eleanor's consciousness as she makes her way through London by bus in the 1891 section of the novel, looking out at "big houses and little houses; public houses and private houses" (*TY* 74). Conceived of as material "pipes, wires, drains," forming a complex subterranean network parallel to the reality overground, they also configure space as "an image of a complex of mobilities, a nexus of in and out conduits" (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 93). The image of the network, as illustrated by the example above, where two sets of networks, one visible, the other invisible, mirror each other, becomes more and more prominent in the novel as the focus shifts from the initial location of the Pargiter family, the house in Abercorn Terrace, to a multiplicity of sites, scattered, across time, throughout London. These different sites – connected by the characters' movement across urban landscape – suggest the dissolution of the late Victorian model of domesticity and the family, as well as "the emergence of new ways of living" (Peach, "Private and Public Spaces" 180).

This section examines the ways in which the paradigm of space as network and the idea of urban flux account for the characters' experience of increased mobility, which inevitably impacts on the notion of home. If, on the one hand, the disintegration of the Victorian home equates with more freedom for the Pargiter women, it also results in relative poverty for those living on their own, a socio-economic effect which Woolf expresses succinctly through descriptions of rooms. Moreover, home and one's rooms take on new meanings against the backdrop of World War I, as illustrated by the 1917 chapter of the novel.

Several elements underpinning the idea of space as network are relevant here. One is the dynamic nature of space, seen as bound up in a network of interrelations that problematise the notion of boundaries. This question is crucial for *The Years*, which thematises the relation between public and private, individual and collective consciousness precisely in those terms. This relation is further foregrounded by the urban setting of the novel, whose states of flux and movement emphasise the changing rhythms of life in the city, as in the image of "[p]eople on foot, people in cabs […] being *sucked in* at the gates of the station" (*TY* 84, emphasis added). The many images of people walking or travelling across the city in the novel lend themselves to a reading in line with Michel de Certeau's interpretation of urban movement. For de Certeau, "[t]he moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place" (103).

One way in which this sense of mobility, with its alienating side-effects, is expressed in the novel is through the record of the rapid technological developments occurring in the first decades of the twentieth century. The literal meaning of the subterranean network of "pipes, wires [and] drains" points in that direction. *The Years* gives – sometimes in the form of vignettes, sometimes in more extended form – a measure of these mechanical, technological and domestic transformations and the ways in which they affect the characters' lives. In her conversation with Peggy in the "Present Day" chapter, Eleanor voices her excitement but also annoyance with the objects and machines of modern life:

> I don't know about aeroplanes, I've never been up in one; but motor cars – I could do without motor cars. […] And wireless – that's a nuisance – the people downstairs turn it on after breakfast; but on the other hand – hot water; electric light […]. (*TY* 241)

As Rachel Bowlby suggests, the inventions listed by Eleanor can be seen "as indicating either progress – the improvement of the quality of life for all – or a general decline in that quality

owing to the same mechanization," hence "a loss of authenticity, a speeding up of life and a trivialization or alienation of a previously more complete form of experience" (124). Eleanor's ambivalence is directed less towards domestic objects and more towards technological innovations, an ambivalence which makes sense in the wider historical context. The "Present Day" chapter which contains this scene is set at the beginning of the 1930s, after the "immense confidence in technology that prevailed at the beginning of the century […] was severely dented by the experience of the First World War" (O'Shea 18).[17] Although Ezra Pound's famous injunction features, barely disguised, in this section of the novel – "then you have to […] make something new, something different, she [Peggy] thought" (*TY* 287) – the tone of "Present Day" is ambivalent, oscillating between disillusionment, nostalgia for the past and a belief in the future's potential for "beauty, simplicity and peace" (318).

The telephone, mapping out both concrete and virtual networks, is one of the symbols of modernity in the novel which illustrates this ambivalence. The telephone allows the characters a new apprehension of space as the experience of simultaneity is rendered possible through virtual communication. After speaking on the phone to North, a nephew recently back from Africa and dining at Sara's place, Eleanor visualises the scene described by North "smiling at the little telephone picture of two people at the other end of London, one of whom was sitting on the edge of her chair with a smudge on her face" (*TY* 237). Rachel Bowlby points out the twofold function of the telephone in this scene: connecting two people but also interrupting two conversations taking place in different London locations (126). In spatial terms, the connection established between the two locations alters their integrity as distinct places. As Bowlby writes, "the link thus established between the two rooms is transferred on to the narrative line, as the scene shifts from Sara's to Eleanor's flat via the telephone call" to the effect that "[t]he physical room is no longer identifiable as a separate scene" (126). The

[17] Jeri Johnson situates the action in the "Present Day" chapter "sometime between 1931 and 1933," based on Peggy's age (351).

same type of juxtaposition as Eleanor's mental comparison between "Canning Place; Abercorn Terrace; this room; that room" in a much earlier scene is made effective through the telephone conversation in the "Present Day" section (*TY* 23). In the 1880 chapter, Eleanor was thinking of the Levys' place in relation to her own home, but somehow the two human and socio-economic realities could not be summoned side-by-side. In the telephone scene, this simultaneity becomes possible. Thus, as Thomas Foster writes, "the telephone locates the experience of mobility and displacement within the boundaries of the home, in a way that calls into question the spatial distinctions that define those boundaries" (109).

The notion of boundaries is key to the 1917 air raid scene in which Eleanor visits Maggie and Renny "who lived in one of the obscure little streets under the shadow of the Abbey" (*TY* 204). Susan Squier notes that one of the "two enormous chunks" deleted from the novel was part of the 1917 chapter and featured "a panoramic portrait of London to suggest the social climate responsible for World War I" (*Virginia Woolf and London* 154). Nothing of this panoramic portrait survives in the published version of the chapter, which focuses almost exclusively on the domestic scene taking place inside Maggie and Renny's rooms. However, Woolf's focus in this scene effectively brings to the fore the associations that Squier detects in the deleted chunk, namely "the relationship between private life and the war that is occupying public attention" (*Virginia Woolf and London* 154). Turning inward to relate the experience of the air raid from the heart of private, domestic space allows Woolf to make a powerful statement about the meaninglessness of war.

As the diary and letters of the 1930s indicate, the intrusion of war into the private space, both physical and psychological, made the experience of this proximity all the more disturbing for Woolf. In the diary entry of 13 March 1936, around the time she was correcting *The Years*, she poignantly records "how near the guns have got to our private life again. I can quite distinctly see them and hear a roar, even though I go on, like a doomed mouse, nibbling

at my daily page" (*D*5: 17). In Anna Snaith's words, the image employed here "reveals her sense of insignificance in the face of war and emphasizes her links with the home, the private space, in contrast with the battlefield, the site of war" (*Virginia Woolf* 137). Yet, the intrusion could not be avoided, as a letter addressed to Julian Bell the same year testifies: "I have never dreamt so often of war. And whats [sic] to be done? Its [sic] rather like sitting in a sick room, quite helpless" (*L*6: 33).

The 1917 air raid scene echoes this sense of intrusion into private space. Significantly, on coming in, Eleanor interrupts a discussion about Napoleon and "the psychology of great men," which obliquely indicates that the war is uppermost in everybody's mind (*TY* 205). The reference to the "psychology of great men" also serves to highlight the connection that Woolf saw between militarism and patriarchy. Sara's later report of her cousin North's visit before leaving for the front and Eleanor's subsequent mental "picture of a nice cricketing boy smoking a cigar on the terrace" constitute an indirect comment on the waste of innocent young men's lives in the war (*TY* 208). All this suggests that the characters' blasé attitude towards the war in the scene is more of a pose, designed to maintain an appearance of normality in the face of the abnormality of all the fighting and killing. The characters' conscious effort to render unreal the reality of the war, as in Nicholas's substituting Renny's image of people killing each other with "children letting off fireworks in the back garden," functions as a form of *mise en abîme* for Woolf's own strategy (*TY* 214). In stressing the domestic character of the scene, Woolf displaces belligerent public discourse, but at the same time suggests that the boundaries of private and public space are permeable. In other words, through a focus on Maggie and Renny's rooms and the experience of the air raid from within, Woolf conflates private space with national space, the threat to the home symbolising the threat to the nation, the home – like the nation – becoming as fragile as a leaf (as pictured by Peggy in the "Present Day" chapter):

> On every placard at every street corner was Death; or worse – tyranny, brutality; torture; the fall of civilization; the end of freedom. We here, she thought, are only sheltering under a leaf, which will be destroyed. (*TY* 284)

Peggy's thoughts indicate that the characters' hope to "live more naturally […] better" following the advent of "the new world" have remained unfulfilled, based, as they were, on the illusory – from Peggy's perspective – belief in human potential for progress (*TY* 216).

In presenting the young Pargiters' new modes of living, the novel multiplies images which suggest the permeation of boundaries, "hint[ing] at both the utopian and dystopian possibilities latent in a modernist sensibility of change and disintegration" (Zimring 128). An earlier scene in the novel finds Sara and Maggie in their new rooms after their parents' death, in an interior which to Rose seems "rather poverty-stricken" and where "the carpet did not cover the floor" (*TY* 121). In Linden Peach's view, this indicates that the two sisters "have moved from one kind of life into a new socioeconomic space in which they are forced to redefine themselves" ("Re-reading Sickert's Interiors" 76). This new space is defined both through the objects contained in the room – such as the sewing-machine or the armchair "which had springs like hoops" – and its relation to the outside world (*TY* 124). Unlike the separation between inner and outer space depicted at the beginning of the novel, here "[t]he street outside Maggie's room intrudes to the extent that it becomes part of the interiority" (Peach, "Re-reading Sickert's Interiors" 76). This permeation is effected mainly through sound, the noise of the street becoming a leitmotif in the scene, as shown by Rose's reiterated question: "But don't you find it rather noisy?" (*TY* 122). The various external sounds interrupt but also punctuate the back-and-forth movement followed by the conversation between Maggie, Sara and Rose. At one point, the interference becomes physical when a dray passing in the street causes the glasses to "jingle […] on the table" (*TY* 123). The scene records a variety of sounds, from the "man crying under the window" and the "great rattle" (*TY* 122-3)

of the dray, to the children "screaming in the road" (127) and, later, when Rose is gone, a drunken man "being thrown out" of the nearby public house (136). These suggest not only an increased proximity between the inside and the outside, but also an intrusion which is "politically and culturally significant," translating as a danger of pollution and contamination (Zimring 130).

Contamination through the permeation of boundaries is the primary focus of the "Present Day" episode featuring Sara's violent anti-Semitic outburst, an episode which has received a great deal of critical attention.[18] As often with the scenes introducing a character's rooms in the novel, the description starts outside. Thus, the socioeconomic data embedded in the sketchy description of the neighbourhood anticipate the nature of Sara's interior. North's voiced criticism of Milton Street – "What a dirty […] sordid […] low-down street to live in" – foreshadows the focus of the scene on dirt and pollution through proximity to other human beings (*TY* 227). As in the earlier scene, pollution is signalled aurally, first by the sound of "heavy footsteps outside the door," then by that of "somebody […] having a bath in the room opposite," on which Sara superimposes the narrative of the "Jew having a bath" and leaving "a line of grease round the bath" (*TY* 248-9). The sounds passing through "the thin walls very distinctly" allow Sara and North to visualise the act next door in its very physicality, suggesting a closeness repulsive to North to the point of sheer physical discomfort (*TY* 249). By her own account, a previous similar occurrence had forced Sara out of her rooms into the desolate landscape of the "[p]olluted city, unbelieving city, city of dead-fish and worn-out frying pans" in an outburst of indignation and disgust (*TY* 249).[19] The violence of the racist discourse and imagery used in this scene makes the idea of dissolving boundaries heavy with political implications, cryptically inscribed on the streets of Sara's neighbourhood in the form

[18] See, for instance, David Bradshaw's (1999) and Maren Linett's (2002) diametrically opposed readings of this scene as illustrative either of Woolf's own anti-Semitism, for Linett, or, on the contrary, of Woolf's critical distance from the pervading anti-Semitism on the 1930s, for Bradshaw.

[19] Jeri Johnson associates the image used by Sara with "at least the sentiment of various lines from T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*" (354).

of "a circle on the wall with a jagged line in it," the symbol of the British Union of Fascists (*TY* 227).[20]

Independently of its more disturbing implications, the incident narrated in this scene also draws attention to the changing forms of living in the novel and the closer points of contact, whether actual or virtual, between people. Sara's street is made up of "old houses now let out as lodgings" (*TY* 227), a conversion further illustrated by the "regular lodging-house skivvy" (230), the "cheap lodging-house plates" and the unpalatable meal (231). Moreover, Sara's having to share the use of the bath with Abrahamson recalls Mr Grice, the real estate agent's suggestion to have Abercorn Terrace cut up into flats and his dissatisfaction with the house not having – in the pompous jargon that annoys Eleanor – "more lavatory accommodation" (*TY* 157). These details suggest not only people being forced into closer proximity, but also the commodification of the home and, more generally, a spatial dynamic thereby which spaces can be modified, restructured, remapped, made to enter into new relations.

The final section of the novel devoted to Delia's party features a good example of this new spatial dynamic. The party takes place in a hybrid space, made up of "the private part of the house" and that taken up by offices (*TY* 266). This is illustrated by the "room on the ground floor which, though an office, had been arranged so that it could be used as a cloak-room," the "house-agents' placards on the wall," or "the deed-boxes with white names painted on them," glimpsed through the open door of a solicitor's office (*TY* 251-2). Later on, in the room designed for supper,

> People were sitting on the floor, on chairs, on office stools. Long office tables, little typewriting tables had been pressed into use. They were strewn with

[20] Noting "the cryptic nature of Woolf's work," Linden Peach argues for a "cryptanalytical" approach, that is one "posited on her oblique use of historical and contemporary events" ("No Longer A View" 192-3). David Bradshaw's "Hyams Place: *The Years*, the Jews and the British Union of Fascists" offers a detailed analysis of this aspect of the novel (179-191).

> flowers, frilled with flowers. 'Sit on the floor, sit anywhere,' Delia commanded, waving her hand promiscuously. (*TY* 291)

The unconventionality of the scene enhances Delia's sense of "promiscuity," resulting from bringing together "[a]ll sorts of people" in an attempt to pull down barriers between those who "did not want spoons" and those who did, and "to do away with the absurd conventions of English life" (*TY* 291). The conjunction of the private event – evocative of home and family life – and the office space and furniture, reminiscent of the public world of work and the marketing of the home, temporarily blurs clear distinctions between the private and the public in the same way that Delia's party aims to blur social boundaries. This, however, does not appear – here as elsewhere in the novel – either completely achievable or entirely free from danger, as Peggy's and North's dissonant voices suggest. For North, the people scattered round the room seem to be "all the same sort […] [f]or all Delia's pride in her promiscuity" (*TY* 296). At the same time, however desirable, for North, "down[ing] barriers" would result in "a world […] that was all one jelly, one mass, […] a rice pudding world, a white counterpane world" (*TY* 300).

North's thought represents only one of the many discourses that intersect each other during the party, a fragile network forming, undoing and re-forming itself into new configurations as the guests move round the room. Ranging from very personal recollections about the Pargiters' past to socio-economic and political concerns – as when the conversation turns to "flats in Highgate hav[ing] bathrooms" (*TY* 285) or "to Africa and the paucity of jobs" – these discourses open up the space of the party to other spaces as well as other moments in time (275). When silence replaces music or speech, this communication between the inside and the outside, past and present, is prefigured through the aural intrusion of "far-away sounds" and "the suggestion they brought in of other worlds, indifferent to this world, of people toiling, grinding, in the heart of darkness" (*TY* 284). Jeri Johnson reads Woolf's use

of the Conradian image of “the heart of darkness” as a way “to signify the primitive darkness that abides at the heart of ostensibly civilized society” (356). The mention of “a horn hoot[ing]” and “a siren wail[ing] on the river” (*TY* 284) also links Woolf’s allusion to the “spatial and cartographic configurations of empire” and “the trade of commodities,” the focus of her 1931 essay “The Docks of London” (Snaith and Whitworth 24-25).

Delia’s party provides an eloquent conclusion to the novel’s writing of spatial history, by allowing the “present day” to emerge out of “the noisy heterogeneity” that marks the interpenetration of private and public space (Zimring 133). This illustrates “the structure of feeling of modernity as being formed from contradictory discourses” (O’Shea 26). As shown in this chapter, the novel unfolds its narrative from the polarised spaces of the 1880s to the new forms of living and experience of space in the first decades of the twentieth century through a sustained attention to the “relationship between the material and the psychological” (Snaith and Whitworth 4). Throughout *The Years*, Woolf interrogates the meanings of personal and public history by anchoring discourses of class, gender and the family in the reconfiguration of spatial relations in the novel, anticipating Michel Foucault’s observation that “space predetermines a history which in turn reworks and sediments itself in it” (*Power / Knowledge* 149).

Chapter 7

Rooms of Memory: "A Sketch of the Past"

At the beginning of "A Sketch of the Past," the main piece in the collection of autobiographical writings published as *Moments of Being* in 1976, then again in extended form in 1985, Woolf wonders whether it is possible for "things we have felt with great intensity" to "have an existence independent of our minds," to be "in fact still in existence" (*MB* 67).[1] What she seems to be asking is whether the past and present can co-exist side-by-side, whether the past can underlie, albeit in the form of trace, the mental topography of the present moment. A similar question lies at the heart of Freud's analogy between the mind / memory and the eternal city of Rome, in "Civilization and Its Discontents," a work which she appears to have been reading in 1939.[2]

Freud uses the analogy in the context of "the more general problem of preservation in the sphere of the mind" and suggests that "in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish" (256). As Steve Pile has noted,

> Rome […] appears to offer a way of materialising or embodying memory and forgetting. […] The adult mind would, then, be like the modern city in that it would contain visible and invisible (not immediately apparent, that is) histories. More than this, these histories co-exist side by side, in both the mind and the city. (112)

In the end, Freud discards the image as incapable of expressing "[t]he fact […] that only in the mind is such a preservation of all earlier stages alongside of the final form possible"

[1] *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind, 2nd edition,1985, 64-159; hereafter referred to as "Sketch."
[2] See diary entry of Saturday, 9 December 1939. The extent of Woolf's knowledge of Freud before 1939 remains unclear. More recently, Gabrielle McIntire has argued that Woolf was a lot more familiar with Freud's theories than critics have acknowledged, but that her initial "ambivalence to psychoanalysis was so intense that she was willing to deny her knowledge of Freud's writings openly" (164). In December 1939, however, Woolf admits to "gulping up" Freud and compares the effect of her autobiographical writing with that of psychoanalysis, as she had done in relation to the writing of *To the Lighthouse* (McIntire 164-5).

(259).[3] However, the analogy remains suggestive to the extent to which it conveys "a set of interlocking relationships between space, time, memory, forgetting and narratives of the self" (Pile 113).

Written in the last years of Woolf's life, against the background of the cataclysmic events of World War II, "Sketch" explores a similar set of relationships, mapping the linkage between the self, space and memory onto urban desolation and wartime trauma. Temporality is inherent in the process of remembering and Woolf explores that dimension repeatedly by juxtaposing past and present ("I now, I then"), by travelling back and forth between the two temporal planes and acknowledging the unstable nature of both – in Hermione Lee's words, a "violent internal zigzag between living in memories and living in the fractured present" (*Virginia Woolf* 714). However, this exploration of the self and the workings of memory leads to "sketching" an emotional geography, in which memories are conveyed through the "socio-*spatial* mediation and articulation" of emotion (Davidson et al 3). In other words, to adapt Davidson et al's formulation, memories "coalesce around and within certain places," which emerge in all their vividness as "scenes," snapshots of a past at once accessible and irretrievable (3).

Freud's juxtaposition between mental and urban landscape is again suggestive here. The impending war threatened both private and collective memory, Woolf's domestic rooms as well as the city she loved. During the writing of "Sketch" from 18 April 1939 to 15 November the following year, this threat became increasingly real, materialising in the heavy bombing of London in 1940, which altered both the space of the city and the topography of Woolf's life through the destruction of the houses in 37, Mecklenburgh Square and 52, Tavistock Square. The meaning of Woolf's tentative autobiography, then, emerges not only as the outcome of an exercise in self-exploration but also from the tension between private

[3] Freud's proviso is "that the organ of the mind has remained intact and that its tissues have not been damaged by trauma or inflammation" (258).

remembering and collective trauma. As Anna Snaith has shown, life writing was a way for Woolf "to carve out a private space […] but even this work, her memoirs, was invaded by the war" (*Virginia Woolf* 132). The hybrid genre of the text, which "slides between autobiography, memoir and diary," testifies to the way in which the war destabilised the act of private remembering, forcing it into a form of resistance similar to that outlined in the 1940 essay "Thoughts on Peace in An Air-Raid" (Snaith, *Virginia Woolf* 132). As this chapter shows, writing autobiographically was not only an attempt to provide a sort of discursive unity for a self and a world threatened with destruction, but also a means to work through that threat.

"The Little Platform of Present Time": Writing Autobiographically

Woolf started "Sketch" on 18 April 1939. The date is recorded at the beginning of the text in the manner of a diary entry, framing her explanation for undertaking to write autobiographically: "Two days ago – Sunday 16th April 1939 to be precise – Nessa said that if I did not start writing my memoirs I should soon be too old" (*MB* 64). Vanessa's observation, set against the example of Lady Strachey's scanty "Recollections of a Long Life," and her own dissatisfaction with Roger Fry's biography both justify the autobiographical impulse. Gabrielle McIntire suggests that Woolf needed an external motivation – her sister's urge – in order to overcome her natural reluctance, in the same way she had needed Molly MacCarthy's when starting to write pieces for the Memoir Club[4] back in the 1920s (149-150).

The memoir presented itself as an antidote to forgetting, a private act of reconstruction of the past through retracing the "visible and invisible […] histories" mapped onto the mind

[4] The Club started in 1920 on the initiative of Molly MacCarthy, Desmond MacCarthy's wife, and "continued in various incarnations through 1956, with its original members including E. M. Forster, Duncan Grant, David Garnett, Maynard Keynes, Roger Fry, Saxon-Sydney Turner, Lytton Strachey, Vanessa and Clive Bell, Molly and Desmond MacCarthy, Adrian Stephen, and Leonard and Virginia Woolf" (McIntire 149).

(Pile 112). Moreover, it was meant to provide some relief from struggling to mould into words someone else's life. Roger Fry's biography, initially conceived of as a freer form of biographical writing, which would take liberties with chronology, had become submerged in the drudgery of factual documentation (Lee 708). Her own memoir, on the other hand, offered her the freedom to take the plunge "without stopping to choose my way, in the sure and certain knowledge that it will find itself – or if not it will not matter" (*MB* 64).

If so, however, Woolf came to it with all the self-consciousness derived from being "a great memoir reader," as she describes herself in the opening lines of "Sketch" (*MB* 64). She was, of course, more than just an avid memoir reader. As Max Saunders has pointed out, Woolf's work is "the most sustained and diverse [modernist] exploration of the relation between fiction and auto/biography" (438). Before attempting her own memoir in 1939, she had thought about, and experimented with, that relation in a variety of texts including essays, reviews, and some of her novels. Significantly, Saunders devotes little attention to "Sketch," mentioned only in passing. Instead, he focuses on texts such as *Jacob's Room*, *Flush* and *Orlando*, viewed as "groundbreaking works," which confirm Woolf's subversive rewriting of the "Victorian 'official' biographic tradition" embodied by Leslie Stephen's *Dictionary of National Biography* (Saunders 438-440).

Woolf's reminder about her thorough familiarity with the genre, used to preface her "first memory," indicates her awareness of the difficulties of memoir writing, explicitly and repeatedly expressed throughout the text. More specifically, these revolved around the question of the possibility of representation, a typically modernist concern intensified by "psychoanalytic views of the mind" which had come to the fore in the 1920s (Saunders 485). As Max Saunders puts it: "If a crucial component of your psyche is obscure to your conscious mind, what is the value of whatever degree of self-knowledge you can attain? And if you don't know the sources of your self, how can you represent yourself?" (485). In "Sketch,"

Woolf expresses similar concerns, questioning her capacity to "g[et] at the truth" (*MB* 69): "The reason is that it is so difficult to describe any human being. […] Who was I then?" (65).

However, she also understands the self historically. Engaging with it was not exclusively a question of pure introspection. It also meant engaging with the time and space(s) of being, as she acknowledges in a section of "Sketch" written on 2 May 1939:

> Consider what immense forces society brings to play upon each of us, how that society changes from decade to decade; and also from class to class; well, if we cannot analyse these invisible presences, we know very little of the subject of the memoir; and again how futile life-writing becomes. (*MB* 80)

The context to the creation of "Sketch" complicates the notion of the utility of life writing, which Woolf evokes here. The imminent war and the socio-economic and intellectual climate of 1939 made the act of memorialization both urgent and futile. If, as Anna Snaith notes, "[t]he threat of death undoubtedly triggered a desire to immortalize herself," it also raised questions as to the meaning, if any, of writing at such a time (*Virginia Woolf* 139).

This dilemma is clearly expressed in Woolf's letter to Ling Su-Hua from Monk's House on 17 April, one day before starting "Sketch." The letter centres on the impact that the international crisis had on publishing and the contemporary readership. Woolf urges Ling Su-Hua not to abandon her autobiography, but deems the prospect of publication unsure, speaking of the "difficul[ty] to continue our publishing for nobody will read anything except politics" and "to go on working under such uncertainty" (*L*6: 327-8). All the same, writing is, in Woolf's words, "the only possible relief from the perpetual strain," an idea which she had already expressed in her previous letters to her Chinese correspondent (*L*6: 327).[5]

In her letter of 5 April 1938 from 52, Tavistock Square, Woolf had encouraged Ling Su-Hua to write her life "not merely as a distraction, but as a work that would be of great

[5]Ling Su-Hua, Julian Bell's Chinese friend, "had written to Virginia that she was helplessly depressed by Japan's invasion of China and her refugee life in the western province of Szechuan" (*L*6: 221, footnote).

value to other people too," adding that she "f[ound] autobiographies much better than novels" (*L*6: 221). In the same letter, Woolf expressed her sympathy for Ling Su-Hua and the situation in China as well as the hope that "[t]he worst may be over" (*L*6: 222). One year later, the political situation justified a much gloomier outlook for both women, but Woolf's advice was the same: "work without caring what becomes of it" (*L*6: 328).[6]

In urging Ling Su-Hua to write her autobiography, Woolf implies that the autobiographical act has added value as testimony to the historical context in which it takes place. In the face of war, however, life writing turns into a distraction; the fate of memorialising one's self, uncertain; what is supposed to last, becomes "partial, contingent and fragmentary" (Snaith, *Virginia Woolf* 53). The point of departure for the memoir is thus a precarious "platform" to stand upon, and this sense of precariousness permeates the process of remembering. The "past is much affected by the present moment" (*MB* 75); at the same time, memories such as the summer holidays at St Ives "can […] be more real than the present moment" (67).

The letter addressed to Ling Su-Hua on 17 April echoes the pervasive feeling of uncertainty recorded in the diary. In the diary entry closest to the beginning of "Sketch" on Saturday 15 April, Woolf wonders at the "extreme depression a little influenza & a cold in head produces," a personal and domestic concern which coexists with that of "our dear old war – now postponed for a month" (*D*5: 215). The term of endearment simultaneously conveys the sense of familiarity with, as well as the menacing presence of, the war. A few lines later the tone changes when she reflects on "the severance that war seems to bring: everything becomes meaningless: cant (sic) plan" (*D*5: 215). The admission of her own private impasse is followed by the acknowledgement that "there comes too the community

[6]For more detailed discussions of the relationship between Virginia Woolf and her Chinese correspondent, see Selma Meyerowitz, "Virginia Woolf and Ling Su Hua: Literary and Artistic Correspondences" (*Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 1982) and Patricia Laurence, "Hours in a Chinese Library: Re-Reading Virginia Woolf, Bloomsbury and Modernism" (*Virginia Woolf: Art, Education, and Internationalism*, 2008).

feeling: all England thinking the same thing – this horror of war – at the same moment," after which "one lapses again into private separation" (*D*5: 215).

The passage illustrates the constant shift between public and private in Woolf's diaries starting from 1938 (Snaith, *Virginia Woolf* 136), as well as her ambivalence towards communal feelings, "all sentimental & emotional parodies of our real feelings" (*D*5: 302). For Adam Piette, this "is not mere Bloomsbury disdain for the masses" but "a genuine expression of fear that the language of feeling is being sacrificed to total-war policies aiming at control of public and private opinion" (179). In Piette's view, Woolf's writing of the period is perfectly symptomatic of what he identifies as "two very deep fears across the range of British wartime experience:" one related to "war's theatricality" and the other, to the threat which the war posed to individual privacy (2). "Sketch" voices both a sense of the unreality of war and the feeling that the boundaries separating the private home from the international conflict raging on its doorsteps were slowly collapsing.

In the diary, the alienation brought about by the intrusion of war into the private sphere and the writer's mind is expressed spatially as a form of placelessness: "the war –our waiting while the knives sharpen for the operation – has taken away the outer wall of security. No echo comes back. I have no surroundings" (*D*5: 299). The "I" is laid bare in the same way that bombed houses are burst open, the writer's voice, no longer validated by the readers' response:[7]

> I have so little sense of a public that I forget about Roger coming or not coming out. Those familiar circumvolutions – those standards – which have for so many years given back an echo & so thickened my identity are all wide & wild as the desert now. (*D*5: 299)

[7] Woolf seems to have felt the loss of her readership – "writing in a vacuum" (*L*6: 430) – more strongly than she had reason to (Snaith, *Virginia Woolf* 133). Despite the surge in public interest in newspapers due to the political situation in the last years of Woolf's life, her books continued to sell well and be well received. *The Years*, in particular, became a bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic.

The instability of the present moment and the fragility of the self deprived of its protective layers inform "Sketch." The memoir emerges as an essentially "palimpsestic text," not only in the way Elizabeth A. Shih and Susan M. Kenney read its palimpsestic nature, namely derived from the existence of different versions of the text and inherent "gaps, conflicts, and editorial inconsistencies" (132). Within the text itself, the process of remembering involves uncovering the various layers forming the emotional makeup of the self. This exploration, however, is also a form of *recovery*, a rebuilding project of sorts in the face of the human and material destruction of war.

The Spatiality of Memory

As well as striving to produce a coherent narrative of the past / self, Woolf's memoir displays a constant preoccupation with the nature of remembering. "Sketch" returns obsessively to questions of how we access past experiences and emotions, and how these can tear through the fabric of the present and feel just as real, if not "more real than the present moment" (*MB* 67). These reflections are repeatedly framed in spatial terms, in ways which resonate with a number of current formulations on the nature of memory.

In *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (1987), the philosopher Edward S. Casey notes that memory has been seen as "primarily a temporal phenomenon," which, in his view, would mean that memory was "largely disembodied" (181-2). For Casey, however, "we do not experience time or its depredations directly" and "there is no memory without a bodily basis", which is itself anchored in place (182). Thus:

> To be disembodied is not only to be deprived of place, *unplaced*; it is to be denied the basic stance on which every experience and its memory depend. As embodied existence opens onto place, indeed *takes place in place* and nowhere else, so our memory of what we experience in place is likewise place-specific: it

> is bound to place as to its own basis. Yet it is just this importance of place for memory that has been lost sight of in philosophical and common sense concerns with the temporal dimensions of memory. (182)

Memory and remembering are, then, indissociable from the spatial dimension of experience. In Casey's words, "memory is naturally place-orientated or at least place-supported" (186-7). Analysing the link between place and memory, Casey posits that "*place is selective for memories*" and "*memories are selective for place*" (189, emphasis in the original). In other words, "a given place will invite certain memories" whilst memories "can deploy themselves" in specific environments, which for Casey "serve to situate what we remember" (189). Casey terms places "congealed scenes" (189), which recalls Woolf's own insistence on scene-making as her "natural way of marking the past" and, therefore, of writing memory (*MB* 142).

Casey spatialises memory itself as "a place wherein the past can revive and survive," thus conceiving of human interiority in spatial terms (186-7). Comparing Western thought to a different cultural mindset such as the Chinese conception of place and memory, he notes that in Western thinking the house is viewed "as an archetypal place for the most significant remembering" (211). Built space thus provides what Diana Fuss calls "architectural model[s] for the human interior," such as Emily Dickinson's poetic conceptualisation of remembrance as "something like a House" with "a Rear and a Front" (6).

The link between memory and "something like a house" is prominently expressed in the work of the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, cited by Casey alongside Martin Heidegger as examples of the prominence of built space in Western thinking about place, memory and the ontological function of dwelling. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard displays an understanding of memory which anticipates Casey's arguments. Like Casey, Bachelard sees memory as inextricably bound up with space, positing that duration cannot be recorded as such but retrievable in "fossilised" form "in and through space" (9). For him, "[t]o localize

a memory in time is merely a matter for the biographer and only corresponds to a sort of external history," unlike the "localization in the spaces of our intimacy" which yields "a knowledge of intimacy" (9). Taking this one step further, Bachelard suggests that "[m]emories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are" (9). He sees the house as the perfect container for the memories of our intimate lives, visualising it as a kind of shell which envelops the human being in the same way as the body.

In a much more recent discussion of memory, space and emotion, Owain Jones postulates that "[l]ife is inherently spatial, and inherently emotional" (Davidson et al. 205). Jones conceives of lived existence as topographically inscribed onto the mind and body, turning us into "vast repositories of past emotional-spatial experiences" (206). In his words, "[e]ach spatialized, felt, moment or sequence of the now-being-laid-down is […] mapped into our bodies and minds to become a vast store of past geographies which shape who we are and the ongoing process of life" (206). Jones draws on a number of scientific and literary sources, including the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's conception of memory. Summarising Damasio's theory of how memory operates, Jones notes that "memory is not just a retrieval from the past or of the past, it is always a fresh, new creation where memories are retrieved into the conscious realm and something new is created" (208). Woolf expresses the same idea intuitively, when, in her memoir, she writes: "this past is much affected by the present moment. What I write today I should not write in a year's time. But I cannot work this out; it had better be left to chance" (*MB* 75).

Two of the questions Jones raises in his article are particularly resonant with Woolf's undertaking in "Sketch":

> Can we recollect past emotional-spatial experiences for the purpose of some attempt at representation? Can we go back to the past terrains and past

> encounters which are mapped inside us and which colour our present in ways we cannot easily feel or say? (206)

"Sketch" asks the same questions, anticipating both Bachelard's and Casey's understanding of memory through its recurrent use of spatial images, not only to recreate "scenes" of the past but also to probe into the process of remembering. As Gabrielle McIntire puts it, the text "might be understood as Woolf's manual for reading memory" (161). The spaces / places recalled to the writer's mind are significant by virtue of their "emotional associations" as well as a way to access, and articulate, past experience (Davidson et al. 3). Woolf, however, incorporates into her writing of memory a more dynamic sense of space than that suggested by Bachelard's image of "motionless" memories.

Throughout "Sketch," she qualifies images and words which are "too static" (*MB* 79). This is manifest, for instance, in her "rough visual description of childhood" as "[a] great hall […] with windows letting in strange lights" to which she adds, of necessity, "the sense of movement and change," a literal expression of time passing (*MB* 79). The unfolding of time is expressed cinematically as a series of moving images: "One must get the feeling of everything approaching and then disappearing, getting large, getting small, passing at different rates of speed" (*MB* 79). Repeatedly in "Sketch," Woolf suggests that remembering is also a question of adjustment of focus, of perspective, of recovering her younger self's way of looking and experiencing things.

Despite this acknowledgement of the instability of memory, Woolf's exploration is persistently situational, attuned to the mind's intimate geography of the past. Remembering involves a movement between different spaces, a mapping out of the self through the identification of loci of emotional significance. The geography of "Sketch" brings together two main locations, St Ives and London, each with its own emotional associations. The text itself significantly opens in-between the two, on the evocation of a journey. Its direction is

deemed secondary: "Perhaps we were going to St Ives; more probably, for from the light it must have been evening, we were coming back to London," but St Ives is preferred to London for "artistic" purposes, as the setting for her famous "first memory" (*MB* 64). Here, the autobiographer takes liberties with memory, favouring narrative fluidity over mere accuracy. A compositional choice, it is also one that is truthful to an emotional reality – as such, it reaffirms the centrality of the memories of St Ives and Cornwall for young Virginia's later life.

Woolf's choice of St Ives is not surprising since that is "where she sites, for the whole of her life, the idea of happiness" (Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 22). As the opening of "Sketch" shows, Talland House occupies a unique place in her spatial mythology of childhood. In Hermione Lee's words, "[h]appiness is always measured for her against the memory of being a child in that house" (*Virginia Woolf* 22). The nursery at St Ives, which is where Woolf situates her much quoted first memory is her place of origin: despite being born in London, "she 'conceives' her first sense of herself, gives birth to herself, out of that room, half a century away" (Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 23). Thus, the memories of that place have a lasting consolatory effect: writing "Sketch" in 1940, she thinks of St Ives "trying to soothe myself to sleep" (*MB* 126).

As Woolf critics have noted, the memories of almost inexpressible "rapture" evoked in relation to St Ives are, to a great extent, associated with the figure of the mother. Although the mother's evocation in "Sketch" is not wholly unproblematic, in the opening of the memoir, her presence gives the place a paradisiacal quality, infusing the scene: "Talland House was full of her. Hyde Park Gate was full of her" (*MB* 83).[8] Julia's death marks the brutal end of

[8]Youngjoo Son, for instance, maintains that in "Sketch," "[t]he portrayal of domestic space as a place of maternal nurture and harmony […] is frequently disrupted" (58). Merry M. Pawlowski argues that the mother is largely distant or absent in "Sketch" and that "Woolf's texts not only indict the father and brother basking in the public world of patriarchy; they indict the mother in the private house as well" (266).

childhood felicity, leaving a lasting emotional imprint on the memory of both St Ives and the Stephens' Kensington home.

Reminiscing in the whole of "Sketch" oscillates between the two destinations, and the mind sometimes "shirk[s] the task" of leaving one for the other, as in the section dated 11 October 1940, when Woolf has to transpose "this boy [Thoby] from the boat to my bed sitting room at Hyde Park Gate" (*MB* 136). The difficulty, as Woolf intimates, does not lie in the imaginative act of taking (her memory of) Thoby from one place to another, but rather in dealing with the emotional content of the space evoked. The leap from St Ives to the Stephens' London home proves painful, hence the mind's resistance to "go into the room at Hyde Park Gate" (*MB* 136).

Remembering also involves the excavation of various spatial, temporal and emotional layers, conveyed through images of depth, layering and juxtaposition. Thus, the past presents itself to the mind as "an avenue *lying behind*" at the end of which are the loci of childhood, "the garden and the nursery" (*MB* 67, emphasis added). At times a different spatio-temporal plane is accessible behind the canopy of the present in the form of "pictures," a term immediately replaced with "impressions" as more adequately suggestive of the synaesthetic nature of the memory evoked (*MB* 67). Woolf illustrates their "strength" and the fact that they "can still be more real than the present moment" by an experiment:

> This I have just tested. For I got up and crossed the garden. Percy was digging the asparagus bed; Louie was shaking a mat in front of the bedroom door. But I was seeing them through the sight I saw here – the nursery and the road to the beach. (*MB* 67)

Past and present overlap to strange effects, like two films whose juxtaposed realities interfere with one another. The past does not as much rupture, as permeate the present, allowing the memories which have left an indelible mark onto the writer's psyche, and the emotions

attached to them, to "come to the top" (*MB* 67). The image of "[a] scene always com[ing] to the top" reoccurs over one year later, in the 11 October 1940 section, suggesting that layering provided a satisfactory metaphor for conceptualising the persistence of past existence within the mind (*MB* 142).

The thought of St Ives causes a detour within the textual space of the memoir: "the strength […] of these impressions makes me again digress" – a digression which turns to memory itself, suggesting that the two share their tortuous nature (*MB* 67). Remembering destabilises the apparent solidity of the present moment, raising the question of the co-existence of different temporal planes, as well as of present versus part emotions. "I feel that strong emotion must leave its trace," she writes, while admitting to the difficulty of "discovering how we can get ourselves again attached to it" (*MB* 67). Wishfully, she imagines tapping into the past by "fit[ing] a plug into the wall" and "turn[ing] up August 1890" as one would a radio (*MB* 67). The technological metaphor allows her to express "the tangibility, touchability, and physicality of the past" (McIntire 168-9).

The superposition of past and present and the multilayered nature of memory and remembering are suggestively expressed in a passage written on 19 July 1939, a month after the Woolfs' last trip to France. Crossing the Channel and thinking of Stella trigger an aquatic image: "[t]he past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river. Then one sees through the surface to the depth" (*MB* 98). As Woolf goes on to explain, paradoxically, she sees such moments as "one of my greatest satisfactions," as if turning to the past was not a way of escaping the present but a means of rendering it complete: "the present when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper than the present when it presses so close that you can feel nothing else" (*MB* 98).

The condition for this to happen is "peace;" any disturbance will otherwise break the "smooth, habitual" surface of the present, reducing the past to "hard thin splinters" (*MB* 98).

As “Sketch” progresses, such peace comes increasingly under threat from the turmoil surrounding the prospect of war, intensifying the feeling of unreality expressed in her questions to Leonard: “What’s there real about this? Shall we ever live a real life again?” (*MB* 98). The fear voiced here confirms Adam Piette’s observation cited at the beginning of the chapter. The image of “hard thin splinters” perfectly captures the difficulty of holding on to a unified sense of self, making the memoirist’s undertaking even more urgent. As Gabrielle McIntire suggests, “writing the past constitutes both the possibility for healing and the source of what she calls ‘the real’” (168). In McIntire’s reading of “Sketch,” healing is connected to past rather than present trauma but, as shown later, the memoir also provides the space to deal with, and compensate for, present destruction and loss.

The next section, dated 8 June 1940, expresses a pervasive sense of contingency. The memoir is a “sheaf of notes” salvaged from the “waste-paper basket,” whose completion is made uncertain by “[t]he battle […] at its crisis” (*MB* 100). The narrative about Jack Hills and Stella offers refuge, an alternative to the “dismal puddle” of the present moment (*MB* 100). On 19 June 1940, it is the father’s turn “to be described” against the aural background of “a blue bottle buzzing and a toothless organ grinding and the men calling strawberries” in the vicinity of her home at 37 Mecklenburgh Square – details which emphasise the juxtaposition between the past memorialised and the present of writing (*MB* 107).

Woolf tackles the task with caution, hesitant about the point of view to adopt, the child’s perspective from which the father loomed large and threatening, or her older self’s – now “much nearer his age” (*MB* 107). She also approaches it with fresh insight into her own feelings toward the paternal figure – “this violently disturbing conflict of love and hate” – as well as a name for them, “ambivalence,” derived from her reading of Freud (*MB* 108). Despite this ambivalence, she attempts to do justice to the father’s memory by acknowledging

the different facets of his persona, from the delicate and irritable child, to the Cambridge intellectual, to "the sociable father" and "the writer father" (*MB* 109-116).

The evocation spills over into July, when she settles on the "tyrant father – the exacting, the violent, the histrionic, the demonstrative, the self-centred, the self pitying, the deaf, the appealing […] father" as that best fit to account for her experience of the family home at 22 Hyde Park Gate (*MB* 116). She sums up the experience in terms of "being shut up in the same cage with a wild beast," portraying herself as the "nervous, gibbering, little monkey" and the father as "the pacing, dangerous, morose lion" (*MB* 116). The description of 22 Hyde Park Gate follows as an expansion of the metaphor: the house constitutes a figure of containment for the father-as-lion memory, as well as the spatial frame within which she can explore her ambivalence.

Unlocking Rooms

In the July 1940 section of "Sketch," the house at 22 Hyde Park Gate functions mnemonically as the gateway to memory, the means by which the memories of the "seven unhappy years" following her mother's death can be accessed (*MB* 136). Woolf sets the scene of reminiscing at night, in her London house, where she projects herself back in her childhood home: "Two nights ago I lay awake in Mecklenburgh Square going over each of the rooms" (*MB* 116). The house provides the perfect "grid" for the retrieval of memories: its architectural outline alongside the shape and content of each room is what enables "impressions" of those years to resurface in the mind.

The functioning of memory in this passage is reminiscent of the classical "art of memory," which Edward S. Casey cites as an example of the prominence attributed to place in relation to memory in ancient Greece (*The Fate of Place* 182). As Frances A. Yates has shown, the "method of *loci*," which consisted in associating images with a number of *loci*,

most often architectural, was a way of training the memory in order to facilitate oral delivery (18). Citing Quintilian, Yates explains that "[t]he first step was to imprint on the memory a series of *loci* or places" such as, for instance, the rooms of a building (18). Then, "[t]he images by which the speech is to be remembered […] are […] placed in imagination on the places which have been memorised in the building. This done, as soon as the memory of the facts requires to be revived, all these places are visited in turn" (Yates 18). Thus, in the mnemonic model described by Yates, built space appears as particularly suitable for "housing" images. Another significant element is the emphasis on sight as a medium of remembering, both of which can be found in Woolf's writing of memory in "Sketch" (Yates 19).

Woolf's re-visitation of her parents' Kensington home is highly suggestive of the type of process described by Yates, although the *loci* she evokes are not imaginary places imprinted onto the mind, but memories of real spaces. In other words, there is an organic relation between the places and memories evoked. In Woolf's own "art of memory," the rooms of 22 Hyde Park Gate conjured by the mind are saturated with emotion, so that the mental tour of the house does not only unlock memories of people and events, but also generates an intimate geography of childhood. What she performs here is akin to Gaston Bachelard's topoanalysis, the "psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives" (8). The way memories arise as she explores every nook and cranny of the house with the mind's eyes anticipates Bachelard, but her house of memory is not the purely benign space described in *The Poetics of Space*.

As Andrew Thacker has shown, Bachelard's view of the house as "felicitous space" is problematic in several respects (16). First, his notion of "place as wholly benign" leaves no room for the possibility that domestic space may be an arena for conflict and power relations. Moreover, Bachelard's focus on the house and interior space excludes "[a]ny sense of exterior

space, whether of streets, cities or nations" (Thacker 16). Nor does his topoanalysis "address questions such as how the architectural design of a house might influence one's topographic attachments, or how the social and political history of architectural forms might alter one's intimate inhabitation of a place" (Thacker 16). For Thacker, a more complex notion of how the interior space of the house might be understood in relation to the exterior spaces of the city is provided by Henri Lefebvre's concept of "social space" (16). Lefebvre's idea of space as bound up with social relations calls into question Bachelard's static view of interior space and its Heideggerian "valuation of place as a site of dwelling" (Thacker 16).

In his discussion of D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, Youngjoo Son further questions "Bachelard's valorization of domestic space in terms of timelessness, stasis, order, and maternity," which "naturaliz[es] the division between female / interior and male / exterior" and "suppresses women's labour in the household" (21-2). Drawing heavily on the Lefebvrian notion of "social space," Son reads the family house in "Sketch" as "a contested battleground for different genders and generations, a multifaceted site for oppression and resistance" (58), testifying to Woolf's awareness of "the multiple meanings of domestic space" (22). Her confessed reluctance to return to the painful memories of the years separating her parents' deaths – "I do not want to go into my room at Hyde Park Gate. I shrink from the years 1897-1904" – supports Son's reading (*MB* 136).

Projecting herself back into her childhood home entailed accessing memories of a time and space of conflict, which saw the family drawing room turn into the theatre of a generational rift opposing "[t]he Victorian age and the Edwardian age" (*MB* 147). Her recollections offer a multilayered reading of the tensions played out against the backdrop of 22 Hyde Park Gate, involving not only different generational mindsets but also issues of class and gender. These tensions were materialised in the spatial / architectural layout of the house itself, "from the dark servants' sitting room, through the 'very Victorian' dining room and the

tea table […] to her father's great study, the 'brain of the house'" (Son 60). The topography explored here recalls the description of Abercorn Terrace in *The Years*.

Woolf's mental tour of her parents' Kensington home starts at the bottom of the house, works its way to the top, and ends with a survey of the neighbourhood, which indicates her attention to the wider urban geography within which the house was situated. The rooms are conjured up successively, starting from the basement, described as a "very low and very dark" space, whose main decorative element – "a vast cracked picture of Mr and Mrs Pattle" – was an object discarded from the realm of better art "upstairs" (*MB* 116). The dining room – "a very Victorian dining-room; with a complete set of chairs carved in oak; high-backed; with red plush panels" – was where Julia Stephen helped her children with French and Latin grammar and where candle-lit dinners "looked very festive" (*MB* 117). She continues with the hall and its heterogeneous collection of decorative and functional objects and, opening out of it, "the front and the back drawing room" (*MB* 117). She tours the remaining rooms floor by floor from the parents' bedroom, the Duckworth siblings' bedrooms above it, to the younger siblings' "night and day nurseries" higher up, the father's study and the servants' bedrooms at the top (*MB* 118-9).[9]

Remembering the house takes the shape of seeing, reconstructing the familiar interior with the minds' eyes, with the two temporal planes (seeing now / seeing then) superposing almost to the point of confusion: "One could hardly see it – who was the woman? I cannot see her – or anything else; for the creepers hung down in front of the window" (*MB* 116). In this passage, sight is the main medium of remembering: objects take shape one after another, mapping out the different sections of the house, furnishing the rooms of memory, marking thresholds, like the "red plush curtain" which signalled the spatial segregation between the servants' and the masters' quarters (*MB* 117).

[9] For a more detailed discussion of the significance of the Victorian study, see the previous chapter as well as Victoria Rosner's *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life*.

The spatial evocation is both emotional and critical. At times, Woolf sees the spaces described through an anthropologist's lens, observing the rituals housed by the different rooms and enabled by specific objects within the household, such as "the tea table round which sat innumerable parties" (*MB* 118).[10] She appears aware of the nature of her reflections, as the analogy below shows:

> Savages I suppose have some tree, or fire place, round which they congregate; the round table marked that focal, that sacred spot in our house. It was the centre, the heart of the family. It was the centre to which the sons returned from their work in the evening; the hearth whose fire was tended by the mother, pouring out tea. (*MB* 118)

The spatial division of gender roles in this passage is replete with meaning: she associates "the sons" with the public sphere of work; "the mother," with the private space of the home, which anticipates the more direct critique in the final sections of the memoir. In similarly anthropological terms, she sees the bedroom as "the sexual centre; the birth centre, the death centre of the house," but the spatial analysis takes a less "scientific" turn as she imagines the room "soaked" with the private life witnessed within its walls (*MB* 118). The image emphasises the interplay between space and affect, reinforced in the description of her former room and its two halves, "the living half" and "the sleeping half," which "fought each other" modelling their occupant's emotions of "rage," "despair," "ecstasy" (*MB* 122-3).

In conjuring up the tensions inhabiting 22 Hyde Park Gate as well as her younger self, Woolf describes herself as an observer of the spectacle performed in the family drawing room: "I felt too what I have come to call the outsider's feeling. I felt as a gipsy or a child feels who stands at the flap of the tent and sees the circus going on inside" (*MB* 152-3). This follows an account of her reluctantly giving in to George Duckworth's authority on grounds

[10] As Woolf recalls, the tea table consisted in "the round table in the middle […] supplemented by a small folding table" (*MB* 118). She attributes the latter animistic qualities writing that it "has followed [her], unwelcomed, even to Monks House" (*MB* 118).

of “his age and his power” so, by adopting the position of a spectator, young Virginia attempts a form of resistance (*MB* 152). The outsider’s perspective – promoted in her feminist writing, most notably in the polemical essay *Three Guineas* – is a way of taking distance from her “weaker” self as well as of disentangling herself from the web of emotions produced by the spectacle of the male “intellectual game” (*MB* 153). The autobiographer’s hesitation to relive her memories of those years – to “go into” the room – functions as a re-enactment of that resistance at a remove.

The circus metaphor in this passage proves a suggestive means of evoking the performance under way in the family drawing room, as well as the gender polarisation of men as “acrobat[s] jumping through hoops” and of women as spectators “only asked to admire and applaud” (*MB* 153). The metaphor also emphasises the importance of competitiveness and success, extending the notion of “w[inning] the game” to “scholarships; triposes and fellowships” and subsequent career prospects as “a Head Master, an Admiral, a Cabinet Minister, or the Warden of a college” (*MB* 153).

However, the image of the “great patriarchal machine” – comprising “the intellectual machine” and “the social machine” – raises questions about the extent to which young men engaged in this game voluntarily (*MB* 153). The idea of men “shot into that machine at the age of ten” suggests little choice although, as Woolf notes, her step-brother George Duckworth eagerly sought admission to both “machines” but only “entered” the latter, coming out with all the endowments attending adept game-playing (*MB* 153). In the passage, George is portrayed both as “an acrobat” and as a source of pressure to conform on his half-sisters, which suggests that he replicates inherited patterns of violence, an idea particularly resonant with the connection between war and patriarchy articulated in *Three Guineas*.

Later, Woolf uses the term “machine” in relation to her younger self as a way of stressing the difficulty to resist a system which discouraged pursuits other than those

sanctioned by society: "Society in those days was a perfectly competent, perfectly complacent, ruthless machine. A girl had no chance against its fangs. No other desires – say to paint, or to write – could be taken seriously" (*MB* 157). Over four decades and a successful career as a writer separate the autobiographer from the young woman striving to succeed in this passage.[11] The deictic "in those days" itself underscores the distance between "now" and then. Nevertheless, Woolf's reflections on the "patriarchal machine" in the last section of "Sketch" bear direct relevance for the troubled present of writing, as well as her understanding of the causes of war previously exposed in her 1938 polemical essay.[12]

In *Three Guineas*, she established a direct link between militarism and the patriarchal education and traditions criticised in "Sketch." In the essay, these traditions are visually represented through photographic illustrations of "the advertisement function" of male ceremonial dress (*TG* 179). It is, however, a different set of photographs which Woolf places at the heart of her denunciation of war in *Three Guineas*, namely the Spanish War "photographs of dead bodies and ruined houses" – a vivid reminder of the consequences of military conflict upon private lives (252). Those photographs are not included in the text but made accessible through the mediation of the narrator, who examines them in the domestic context of home:

> Here then on the table before us are photographs. [...] This morning's collection contains the photograph of what might be a man's body, or a woman's; it is so mutilated that it might, on the other hand, be the body of a pig. But those certainly are dead children, and that undoubtedly is the section of a house. A bomb has torn open the side; there is still a bird-cage hanging in what was

[11] As Woolf records, on confessing her desire to be a writer to Lady Beatrice Thynne at the time, she was offered to meet Andrew Lang, a journalist and man of letters, and was considered "excessively foolish" when she didn't show enough interest in the prospect (*MB* 157).

[12] Linking the condemnation of patriarchy in *Three Guineas* and the memoir, Merry M. Pawlowski reads the two texts conjointly, arguing that "[e]ach work has the power to interanimate and build a context for the other while demonstrating Woolf's increasing personal commitment to social change" (258).

> presumably the sitting-room, but the rest of the house looks like nothing so much as a bunch of spillikins suspended in mid-air. (*TG* 164)[13]

The photographs are introduced as "statements of fact addressed to the eye" but their force invalidates their factual nature. Their sight forces the brain and the nervous system into a form of "fusion" resulting in "violent" emotions (*TG* 164-5). The narrator extends these "sensations" onto the reader, both united in their instinctive reaction of "horror and disgust," "however different the education, the traditions behind us" (*TG* 165). The pairing of children's dead bodies and sectioned houses makes for a powerful image of human and material loss, whose poignancy lies in the sense of arrested existence, of life cut short, "suspended in mid-air" like the bird-cage in the cracked shell of a former room. As Maggie Humm points out, the focus is emphatically domestic – the house recalls "a child's game of 'spillikins,' a domestic game" ("Memory, Photography, and Modernism" 650). This reinforces the senselessness of war beyond any ideological justification.

The bombed houses in the Spanish photographs anticipate the desolation of World War II and the heavy bombing of London, which Woolf records in her writings of the period. As the next section shows, she often expresses the threat of death and destruction in terms of a threat to the private home, as she had done in the parenthetical section "Time Passes" in *To the Lighthouse* or, closer to the writing of "Sketch," *The Years*. This threat constitutes the background to the memoir, accounting for what Lyndsey Stonebridge terms its "aesthetic under pressure" (5). The focus on built space and its fragility in the face of destruction provides an expressive means of materialising loss and voicing her affective response to the traumatic experience of war.

[13] For a lengthy discussion of the role of photography in the text and the symbolic of the absent photographs, see Maggie Humm, "Memory, Photography, and Modernism: The 'dead bodies and ruined houses' of Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*." As Maggie Humms points out, Woolf adopts the same setting (home) "with similar intent" in her 1940 essay "Thoughts on Peace in an Air-Raid," discussed in more detail in the following section (651).

War: A Spatial Poetics of Loss

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf sketches a poetics of loss by inscribing the passage of time and the destruction of war onto the family summer house on the Isle of Skye. The section offers a poetic account of the house's different stages of decay and its ultimate victory against the elements, made possible by the titanic work of Mrs McNab. The description of the house prey to the destructive forces of nature successfully replaces the narrative of historical change, conveyed obliquely, by means of allusion and metaphor. The characters' lives, too, are bracketed off, so that major events such as Mrs Ramsay, Prue and Andrew's deaths feature in the text only parenthetically, as marginal incidents of human drama.

The domestic scene of the extinction of lamps by the Ramsay children and the house guests at the beginning of "Time Passes" prefaces the change coming over the house and prefigures the "downpouring of immense darkness" in section 2, both thinly veiled allusions to the start of war.[14] Darkness is shown to invade the house gradually, "creeping in at keyholes and crevices," "swallow[ing] up" the contours of lived space, obliterating furniture, decorative objects as well as the human bodies themselves (*TL* 103).[15] The house's occupants become ghostly presences, mere limbs and disembodied sounds, evocative of the human loss on the war front. Initially, the sleeping bodies in the bedroom counter the threat of general dissolution with something "steadfast" (*TL* 104).[16] The "certain airs, detached from the body of the wind," which inspect the house room by room, testing the resistance of both human and material life, find in it something they "can neither touch nor destroy," although later, the family does not remain immune to death and destruction (*TL* 103-4).

[14] According to David Bradshaw, Woolf specifically echoes the image used by the Foreign Secretary (1905-1916) Sir Edward Grey in August 1914 when he declared: "The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime" (*TL* 191, editor's note).
[15] The diary entry of 7 June 1940 echoes the symbolic conjunction between war, darkness and death conveyed in this passage: "Question of suicide seriously debated [...] in the gradually darkening room. At last no light at all. This was symbolic" (*D*5: 292).
[16] "The gradual dissolution of everything" is one of the ideas featuring in the "Outline" of "Time Passes" in the manuscript (*TL* 191, editor's note).

In section 4, the siege mounted on the empty house by the same "airs, advance guards of great armies," encounters little resistance. With friends and family gone, what is left is "only hangings that flapped, wood that creaked, the bare legs of table, saucepans and china already furred, tarnished, cracked" (*TL* 105-6). As in the description of Jacob's room, where the young man's slippers offer a material reminder of their departed owner, here, too, the impression of emptiness is heightened by the clothes left behind, which "indicated how once they were filled and animated" (*TL* 106). Halfway through the description, however, the bleakness of the decaying house is qualified by more positive attributes such as "[l]oveliness and stillness," conveying a sense of aesthetic beauty which transforms its emptiness and gives it an "air of pure integrity," suggestive of permanence and indestructibility (*TL* 106). In the end, the house "remains," and Mrs McNab's scrubbing campaign proves successful, marking the victory of built space over destruction (*TL* 106).

In *To the Lighthouse*, the war remains an elusive presence, evoked through indirectness and metaphor. By the late 1930s, however, armed conflict had got much closer to home again. In the caesura between the last 1939 section of "Sketch" dated 19 July, and the recovery of the "sheaf of notes" on 8 June 1940, waiting stopped and the war began, and with it, the advent of "an empty meaningless world" (*D*5: 234).[17] The diary entry three days after the official announcement of the outbreak of war on 3 September 1939 reads like a telegram of desolation:

> Boredom. All meaning has run out of everything. Scarcely worth reading papers. […] Emptiness. Inefficiency. I may as well record these things. My plan is to force my brain to work on Roger. But Lord this is the worst of all my life's experiences. (*D*5: 234)

[17]I am drawing inspiration from Hermione Lee's suggestive title imagery in her biography of Woolf. Chapter thirty-eight spanning the years 1937 (marked by the death of Julian Bell in the Spanish war) until the outbreak of war in September 1939 is entitled "Waiting," followed by "War" (chapter thirty-nine).

The sense of desolation expressed here erupts into her memoir so that, when she resumes work on "Sketch" in June 1940, she wonders: "Shall I ever finish these notes – let alone make a book from them?" (*MB* 100). Death is evoked as a real possibility, not only as a consequence of the battle "com[ing] closer to this house daily" but also as the outcome of a conscious, joint decision to commit suicide with Leonard in the event of defeat (*MB* 100).[18] As she was writing, the fighting was getting nearer and nearer, an intrusion which surfaces in the text in the form of short notes prefacing the mind's hasty return to the past. On 18 August 1940, as "five German raiders passed so close over Monks House that they brushed the tree at the gate," the closeness of war becomes unnerving, making "being alive" and able to write the following day a matter of mere chance (*MB* 124).

The war had also started to maim the face of the city she loved, so going back to London in 1940 occasioned desolate accounts of the changed urban landscape. That year, both 37 Mecklenburgh Square and 52 Tavistock Square were hit by bombs. The house at 37, Mecklenburgh Square was only a recent home to the Woolfs. They had found it after their trip to France in June 1939 and moved there during August, leaving behind 52 Tavistock Square, their home of fifteen years, which "was threatened with demolition" (*L6*: 336). Unluckily, the Mecklenburgh house was the first to be hit in September 1940, followed by Tavistock Square in October.

Writing an account of the state of their bombed house in Mecklenburgh Square in her diary on Sunday, 20 October 1940, Woolf muses on the loss of possessions and the sense of "relief" which the prospect engenders: "I shd like to start life, in peace, almost bare – free to go anywhere" (*D*5: 332). The passage uncannily recalls the note made nearly forty years earlier, where young Virginia extolled the virtues of Gipsy living, longing for "[a] house that is rooted to no one spot but can travel as quickly as you change your mind" (*PA* 208).

[18]At the time, suicide was seriously envisaged not only by the Woolfs but also by other people in their circle (Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 730).

However, the fleeting sense of liberation from the weight of material possessions is overshadowed by the realisation of the impact of air-raids on the urban landscape so familiar to her, described in vivid terms in two letters to Ethel Smyth.

The letter of 11 September from Monk's House relates the couple's trip to London the previous day and the sights of bombed London: the house opposite theirs in Mecklenburgh Square, "nothing but a heap of brick, smoking still," and "Holborn […] [a]ll heaps of glass, water running, a great gap at top of Chancery Lane" (*L*6: 429). In the postscript to the letter, dated 12 September, she writes:

> What touched and indeed raked what I call my heart in London was the grimy old woman at the lodging house at the back, all dirty after the raid, and preparing to sit out another. We, after all, have at least been to Italy and read Shakespeare. They havent: dear me, I'm turning democrat. And then, the passion of my life, that is the city of London – to see London all blasted, that too raked my heart. (*L*6: 431)

Her self-mocking awareness of class privilege over the London poor betrays a trace of lightness, but her response to the sights of destruction is full of emotion.

Woolf recreates the experience of wartime bombing in "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," a text composed around the same time "for an American symposium on current matters concerning women" (*CE*4: 173). The link between creativity and memory in the midst of wartime trauma which she draws there resonates with her undertaking in "Sketch." As Stuart N. Clarke has recently documented, the essay had been long in the making, its beginnings dating back to September 1938, when Woolf was asked to write something "controversial" for the New York *Forum* by its editor Phyllis Moir (*E*6: 245). In December 1939, the request was specifically "to write about women & peace" (*D*5: 249). However, as Woolf reflected in a letter to Shena Simon, her "views on peace […] sp[rung] from views on

war" (*L*6: 379). These revolved around questions she had already raised in *Three Guineas*, including the possibility of "alter[ing] the crest and the spur of the fighting cock" (*L*6: 379).[19]

In "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," the writer's voice is located inside the private home under threat of imminent bombing, registering, as it were, the different stages of the air-raid. These are mainly perceived aurally, from "the zoom of a hornet, which may at any moment sting you to death" (*CE*4: 173) to "[t]he drone of the planes […] now like the sawing of a branch overhead," to the dropping of a bomb causing the windows to "rattle" (174), followed by the few seconds of intense dread when a bomb is expected to fall "on this very room" (176). The house offers precarious shelter: the Englishwoman's body is both housed and trapped inside the home, "a gas-mask handy," just as the airman is "boxed up in his machine with a gun handy" – the two "equally prisoners" to the ideologies justifying war (*CE*4: 174).

As I have detailed in the previous chapter, in the 1917 section of *The Years*, Woolf adopts the same narrative strategy, locating her characters' experience of war inside the domestic home and doing away with the depiction of the wider political context leading to international conflict.[20] Forced to retreat into the "crypt-like" cellar with the remnants of their meal, Maggie, her husband René and their guests experience the air raid perceptually, which, as in "Sketch" or the 1940 essay, emphasizes their vulnerability as passive subjects:

> The Germans must be overhead now. She [Eleanor] felt a curious heaviness on top of her head. One, two, three, four, she counted, looking up at the greenish-grey stone. Then there was a violent crack of sound, like the split of lightning in the sky. The spider's web oscillated. (*TY* 212)

The effects of the threat in the scene are expressed elliptically. The sense of "heaviness," the "dead silence" accompanying the wait in the cellar contrast with Maggie's soothing

[19]The letter and the diary entry are both cited by Stuart N. Clarke as part of the genesis of the text in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf Vol.6: 1933 to 1941*, 246.
[20] See Susan M. Squier, *Virginia Woolf and London: The Sexual Politics of the City*, 154, cited in Chapter 6.

reassurance to her children – "That was nothing. Turn round and go to sleep" (*TY* 212). The juxtaposition sets into sharp relief the gap between the reality of private life and the alien presence of enemy planes overhead.

In "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," the psychological effects of the shock are pictured in more vivid terms as a form of emotional and intellectual paralysis, a freezing of "all thinking" and "[a]ll feeling save one dull dread" deemed "sterile, unfertile" (*CE*4: 176). The mind, however, is quick to recover, resorting to memory as a reconstructive tool: "Directly that fear passes, the mind reaches out and instinctively revives itself by trying to create. Since the room is dark it can create only from memory" (*CE*4: 176). In the air-raid darkness, memory is what allows the mind's creative impulse to overcome the "emotion of fear and hate" by recalling "other Augusts – in Bayreuth, listening to Wagner; in Rome, walking over the Campagna; in London" (*CE*4: 176). Remembering is thus a restorative process, which draws on the fluidity of the past to smooth over the fractures of the present, in much the same way as writing about the past in "Sketch" involves a "holding together" of the present.

The mind's ability to withstand the "queer experience" described in the essay (*CE*4: 173) is reminiscent of what Woolf calls her "shock-receiving capacity" in her memoir (*MB* 72). Lyndsey Stonebridge links this capacity to the notion of anxiety, which she distinguishes from trauma, following Freud's reading of it in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Thus, "[a]nxiety is a 'protection' against trauma; it is a way of staying in relation to history without being consumed by it" (Stonebridge 4).[21] As evidenced by the account of the mind's coping mechanisms, for Woolf, writing constituted both an outlet for anxiety and a refusal to give in to the "sterile dread" of war trauma.

[21] Stonebridge draws on Freud's image of anxiety as "protect[ing] its subject against fright" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Penguin, 1984, 292).

The essay makes the home the site of private resistance to war and its supporting ideologies, although in *Three Guineas*, Woolf shows the two spheres (private / public) to be inextricably linked. The resistance outlined here is meant to extend beyond the private realm and reach out to the young men caught up in war, freeing them of "their fighting instinct, their subconscious Hitlerism," whose origins and manifestations she analysed in *Three Guineas* (*CE*4: 175). A fragile shelter for its inhabitants, the house is nonetheless the place where peace can be "thought into existence" through "private thinking, tea-table thinking" – an alternative to "officer tables and conference tables" as well as loud war propaganda (*CE*4: 174).

Woolf's incomplete memoir testifies to a desire to resist the meaninglessness of war by opposing it an, albeit fractured, narrative of the self in which past and present sustain each other. As Avrom Fleishman notes, turning to the past does not result in "an estrangement from the present but a heightened sense of its reality" (467). It is this sense of the troubled reality of the present that gives the autobiographical voice in "Sketch" its raw, urgent quality, revealing "the war's power to displace and unsettle, its violent dismantling of ordinary ideas of home and private life" (Piette 7). Ultimately, the text is only a succession of fragments, scenes conjured up in the interstices of the mind, traces of past emotional geographies filtering into the troubled topography of the present, but its appeal and testimonial value lie precisely in the imperfection of this reconstruction.

Conclusion

Woolf's last novel is set in the grounds of a house in the middle of the English countryside.[1] The house, whose name, Pointz Hall, was the book's working title before it became *Between the Acts*, suggestively condenses the connections and semantic juxtapositions which, as this study has argued, are characteristic of Woolf's writing of space. These are conveyed through the novel's spatio-temporal layering, expressive of the instability of reality, history, artistic vision – a powerful aesthetic as well as political statement about the present's crisis of signification.[2]

Woolf wrote *Between the Acts* at a time of great anxiety, while awaiting the outbreak of another war, but, as Gillian Beer points out, the novel is a "mischievous and playful work, as well as one that muses much upon death and extinction" ("Introduction" ix). The conjunction between inventiveness and play, on the one hand, and fragmentariness, dispersion and destruction, on the other, lies at the heart of the novel's writing of "present time." This is a present poised between a past going as far back as "what was before time was" (*BA* 24) and an uncertain future, glimpsed through ominous allusions, although for someone like Mrs Swithin "[w]e've only the present" (51). It is a present clothed in the appearance of normality – a pageant on a summer day in the English countryside – whose underlying theatricality is revealed by Miss La Trobe's daring experiment, as one moment in a series of historical moments, unstable and cacophonous.

More than a mere setting for La Trobe's pageant, Pointz Hall stages as well as illustrates the novel's oscillation between playfulness and anxiety, the seemingly solid reality of the present moment and layer upon layer of past spatio-temporal realities. Before its

[1] I am aware of Mark Hussey's observation that "last novel" is a somewhat improper term to use, since "there *is* no work that Woolf saw into print as her 'last novel.' *Between the Acts* remains in process, permanently deferred" (lxi, emphasis in the original).

[2] Gillian Beer links her observation that "[s]ignifying is a limited activity" to the novel's emphasis on emptiness ("Introduction" xxvii).

dramatic enactment in the pageant, this "layeredness" is thematised early on in a scene showing Mrs Swithin waking up to the sound of birdsong in her room. The scene juxtaposes the material space of the room with the mental picture of "rhododendron forests in Piccadilly" and a time "when the entire continent […] was all one," brought about by the character's reading of "an Outline of History" (*BA* 8). The return to prehistory, one of the novel's leitmotifs, is interrupted by the arrival of a servant, initially indistinct from the "grunting monster […] in the green steaming undergrowth of the primeval forest," and followed by another leap, this time into Mrs Swithin's own history (*BA* 8). The latter is figured as "flights […] down corridors and alleys," a chaotic exploration of the topography of memory, suspended by the admonitory image of "her mother in that very room rebuking her" (*BA* 8). The scene comically orchestrates the slippage between various spatialities – the room / house at different moments in time, the mind, the dark terrain of a prehistoric England undivided from the continent – mimicking the pageant's later juxtapositions.

The referential instability resulting from the conflation of material and metaphorical space, evoked on a lighter tone here, takes on more sombre connotations in later scenes. There, prehistory symbolises the annihilation of dwelling, a return to the "night before roads were made, or houses," which can be read as an anticipation of the violence and destruction of war (*BA* 130). The analogy generates a sense of the house as fragile shelter, which is symptomatic of the historical context in which the novel was written and set, echoing the sense of threat voiced in "A Sketch of the Past" or the "Present Day" chapter of *The Years*. The room – shell analogy and images of emptiness in the novel carry the same suggestions.[3] As Gillian Beer notes, "[a]t different times we are told that the nursery is empty, the stage is empty, the barn is empty, the room is empty" ("Introduction" xxvii).

[3] In an early scene, the shell image is explicitly linked to the notion of emptiness: "Empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent. The room was a shell, singing of what was before time was" (*BA* 24). The shell image reoccurs twice in the last scene of the novel in conjunction to nightfall and the figurative return to prehistoric darkness.

As suggested earlier, Pointz Hall is not only the setting for the countryside pageant, but also a "site" of social critique, participating in the narrative of Englishness dramatised by Miss La Trobe's pageant. Despite the Olivers' claim to a less illustrious pedigree than "the old families who had all inter-married, and lay in their deaths inter-twisted, like the ivy roots," the house boasts its own "legitimising" portrait – the "small powdered face" of "an ancestress of sorts" – "[s]ix or seven bedrooms," a butler and an encased relic from Waterloo (*BA* 7). The interior's staging of its own history as material objects on display for visitors such as Mrs Manresa and William Dodge is expressive of vague class anxieties, mirroring the novel's play with ideas of Englishness, empire (Mr Oliver, the house's owner, is a former official in the Indian Civil Service) and the nation.

Later in the novel, La Trobe's pageant incorporates Pointz Hall into its dramatisation of history, making it the material embodiment of the Victorians' worship of the home – "Ome, Sweet 'Ome" (*BA* 102) – and the "comic unravelling of Victorian domesticity" (Beer, "Introduction" xxix). As the novel intimates, home is also the site of lurking violence, the place where, in the final scene, husband and wife "must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night" before they embraced (*BA* 129). Allusions to violence are scattered throughout the novel, suggestive of the connection between "private and public tyrannies" expressed in *Three Guineas*. La Trobe's integration of the house into her pageant, a *mise en abîme* of Woolf's use of Pointz Hall in her novel, is symbolic of the artist's understanding of productive / performative ways of encoding and representing built space. As it were, the house becomes part of the discursive space of the pageant (or, more precisely, one of the several culturally inflected discursive formations which make up La Trobe's creation).

As briefly outlined above, *Between the Acts* helpfully foregrounds a number of relevant junctures for Woolf's writing of space: the material / metaphorical interface in the

representation of built space, the intersection of space and time (as illustrated by the repeated layering of spatial and temporal planes), as well as the relation between individual consciousness and history as embedded in specific – albeit unstable – cultural, ideological and discursive spatial formations.

As shown throughout this study, Woolf's writing moves freely between different kinds of space so that her "rooms" can only be read as part of these wider geographies. The movement "in and out of rooms" mapped out in her works conveys a dynamic sense of space, emphasising the interconnectedness of various spaces, but her "rooms" also invite attention to the ways in which certain locations articulate particular sets of relations. This is crucial for her feminist politics, and her critique of space as culturally and ideologically charged. Rarely endowed with photographic accuracy, her interiors are all the more "suggestive" – the term she uses to define rooms in *Night and Day*, as detailed at the beginning of this study – in their recreation of atmosphere through objective and subjective (re)construction.[4] "Imaginative reconstruction" – the mental activity she attributes to Lucy Swithin in the scene discussed earlier – makes the room trope also particularly suitable for the figuration of psychological interiority and the workings of memory (*BA* 8). Rather than viewing these different "readings" of rooms as discrete interpretative models, this study sees them at their most productive as semantic variations whose permutations reveal the richness and inventiveness of Woolf's spatial imaginary.

[4] In using the term "objective," I am also alluding to Woolf's attention to objects as material things whose existence independent of human consciousness is something which she thematises in her writing, for instance in the description of the Ramsays' house in *To the Lighthouse* or that of Jacob's room, often as a poignant signifier for human absence. An examination of such objects – as in my discussion of the mother's portrait in *The Years* – is potentially fruitful for the recent "return to the object" in modernist studies.

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